

PZ 3

.A294

T16

COPY 1

FT MEADE
GenCol

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Chap. Copyright No.

Shelf PZ 3
.A294 T2

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



Pat
No. 567.

142
10 Cents.



LOVELL'S LIBRARY

A TRI-WEEKLY PUBLICATION OF THE BEST CURRENT & STANDARD LITERATURE

Vol. 11. No. 567. April 18, 1885. Annual Subscription, \$30.00.

THE TRAIL-HUNTER

BY

GUSTAVE AIMARD

AUTHOR OF "PEARL OF THE ANDES,"
"THE ADVENTURERS," ETC.

Entered at the Post Office, N. Y., as second-class matter.
Copyright, 1884, by JOHN W. LOVELL Co.

NEW-YORK
* JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY *
14 & 16 VESEY STREET

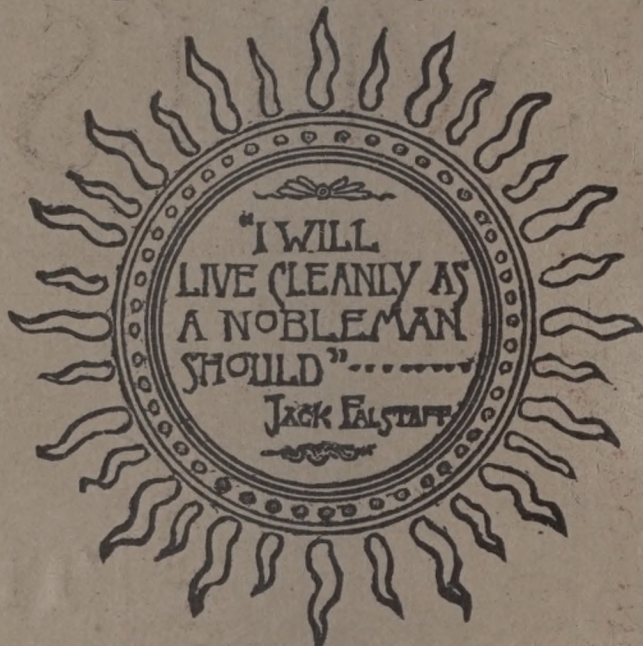


JECKER MATCHLESS PIANOS
BROTHERS' 33 UNION SQUARE, N. Y.

Know All Women BY THESE PRESENTS, THAT while sundry and almost countless imitations of and substitutes for Enoch Morgan's Sons Sapolio are offered by unscrupulous parties, who do not hesitate to represent them as the original article,

This Indenture WITNESSETH, THAT there is but one Sapolio, to wit:—the original article manufactured by the Enoch Morgan's Sons Co., of New York, unsurpassed in quality, unexcelled in popularity, and widely known not only through its own merits, but through the many original modes which have been adopted to introduce it to the attention of the public. Imitation is the sincerest flattery. Cheapness is a poor proof of quality. Cheap imitations are doubly doubtful. The most critical communities are the most liberal purchasers of Sapolio which they invariably find to be worth the price they pay for it.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, we hereby affix a great seal and our corporate title.



ENOCH MORGAN'S SONS CO.

ESTABLISHED HALF A CENTURY.

MARVIN'S
FIRE & BURGLAR

SAFES

HAVE MANY
PATENTED IMPROVEMENTS

NOT FOUND IN
OTHER MAKES

THAT WILL WELL REPAY AN
INVESTIGATION

BY THOSE WHO
DESIRE TO SECURE

THE BEST SAFE
MARVIN SAFE CO.

NEW YORK, PHILADELPHIA,
LONDON. ENGLAND.

BALL'S



CORSETS

LADIES!

If you appreciate a Corset that will neither break down nor roll up
in wear,

TRY BALL'S CORSETS.

If you value health and comfort,

WEAR BALL'S CORSETS.

If you desire a Corset that fits the first day you wear it, and needs
no "breaking in,"

BUY BALL'S CORSETS.

If you desire a Corset that yields with every motion of the body,

EXAMINE BALL'S CORSETS.

If you want a perfect fit and support without compression,

USE BALL'S CORSETS.

Owing to their peculiar construction it is impossible to break ~~the~~
Ball's Corsets.

The Elastic Sections in Ball's Corsets contain no rubber, and are ~~not~~
wanted to out-wear the Corset.

Every pair sold with the following guarantee:

"If not perfectly satisfactory in every respect after three
weeks' trial, the money paid for them will be refunded (by the
dealer), *Soiled or Unsoiled.*"

The wonderful popularity of Ball's Corsets has induced rival manufacturers
to imitate them. If you want a Corset that will give perfect satisfaction,
insist on purchasing one marked, **PATENTED FEB. 22, 1881.**

And see that the name BALL is on the Box.

For Sale by all Leading Dry Goods Dealers.

HENRY GEORGE'S LATEST WORK.

Protection or Free Trade?

AN EXAMINATION OF THE TARIFF QUESTION WITH ESPECIAL REGARD
TO THE INTERESTS OF LABOR.

By HENRY GEORGE,

Author of "Progress and Poverty," "Social Problems,"
"The Land Question," etc.

12mo, Cloth. Price, \$1.50.

CONTENTS.

- | | |
|--|--|
| I. Introductory. | XVI. The development of manu-
factures. |
| II. Clearing ground. | XVII. Protection and producers. |
| III. Of method. | XVIII. Effect of protection on Am-
erican industry. |
| IV. Protection as a universal need. | XIX. Protection and wages. |
| V. The protective unit. | XX. The abolition of protection. |
| VI. Trade. | XXI. Inadequacy of the free trade
argument. |
| VII. Production and producers. | XXII. The real weakness of free
trade. |
| VIII. Tariffs for revenue. | XXIII. The real strength of pro-
tection. |
| IX. Tariffs for protection. | XXIV. The paradox. |
| X. The encouragement of indus-
try. | XXV. The robber that takes all
that is left. |
| XI. The home market and home
trade. | XXVI. True free trade. |
| XII. Exports and imports. | XXVII. The lion in the path. |
| XIII. Confusions arising from the
use of money. | XXVIII. Free trade and socialism. |
| XIV. Do high wages necessitate pro-
tection? | XXIX. Practical politics. |
| XV. Of advantages and disadvan-
tages as reasons for pro-
tection. | XXX. Conclusion. |

For sale by all booksellers, or sent prepaid by mail on receipt
of price.

HENRY GEORGE & CO.,

16 Astor Place, New York.

The Century Magazine.

THE CENTURY is an illustrated monthly magazine, issued on the first day of each month, and containing one hundred and sixty pages (or more), with from forty to eighty illustrations. It has a regular circulation of about two hundred thousand copies, often reaching and sometimes exceeding two hundred and twenty-five thousand. Of these a large edition is sold in England, where THE CENTURY has been the leading periodical of its class for upwards of ten years. The magazine was founded in 1870. In 1881 it took the name "The Century," and the name of the corporation which published it became "The Century Co." It has been called by the N. Y. *Nation* "the best edited magazine in the world."

In it are published novels and stories by our leading writers, including Frank R. Stockton, George W. Cable, Dr. Edward Eggleston, Julian Hawthorne, Mary Hallock Foote, and others. It contains illustrated articles in travel, science, art, history, and other fields of literature; essays on the prominent questions of the day; poems; sketches, etc. It is "the most American of our magazines." A remarkable serial is now appearing in THE CENTURY. It is a history of our own country in its most critical period, as told in



THE LIFE OF LINCOLN,

BY HIS CONFIDENTIAL SECRETARIES, JOHN G. NICOLAY
AND COL. JOHN HAY.

This great work, begun with the sanction of President Lincoln and continued under the authority of his son, the Hon. Robert T. Lincoln, is the only full and authoritative record of Lincoln's eventful life. Its authors have had every facility for writing a complete and accurate biography, and they have ardently fulfilled their duty, and have produced "the most important of American historical biographies."

Subscription, \$4.00 per year; 35 cents per number.

SOLD BY ALL DEALERS.

THE CENTURY CO., NEW YORK.

St. Nicholas, for Young Folks.

Edited by MARY MAPES DODGE.

ST. NICHOLAS is a monthly illustrated magazine for girls and boys of all ages. The little children are remembered every month, and those who are blossoming into manhood and womanhood are not too old to find amusement and instruction in its pages. The *Christian Union* said long ago that it was "for children from five to eighty-five."

It has a large circulation in England as well as in America. The *London Times* has said, "We have nothing like it on this side." It is clean and true and helpful,—it has been called "a liberal education in itself." Every one who has seen ST. NICHOLAS likes it.

Subscription, \$3.00 per year; 25 cents per number.

THE CENTURY CO., New York.

PZ 3
A294 Tl
6

GUSTAVE AIMARD'S WORKS

CONTAINED IN LOVELL'S LIBRARY.

NO.		PRICE.
560	The Adventurers,	10C.
567	The Trail-Hunter,	10C.
573	Pearl of the Andes,	10C.

PREFACE.

THE present volume of Aimard's Indian Tales is devoted to the succeeding adventures of those hunters, whose acquaintance the reader has formed, with pleasure, in the preceding volumes. It does not become the Editor to say anything further in its favour than that the sustained interest of the narrative, which has been regarded as the charm of stories referring to life in the desert and the prairie, has not been departed from in this instance. The stories themselves supply an innate proof of the writer's correctness to nature, and, in truth, many of the scenes are so startling that they must be the result of personal observation.

The issue of the "TRAIL-HUNTER" affords a suitable opportunity for thanking the Press generally for the kindly aid they have rendered in making the character of Aimard's Indian Tales known to the British reading public and for the hearty way in which they have recognised the merits of the preceding series. It would be an easy task to collect paragraphs expressing a belief that Aimard is second to none of the writers who have hitherto described Indian life and scenery; but it is preferable to rest our hopes of continued success upon the inherent qualities of our Author's stories.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE JAGUARS	5
II. DON MIGUEL ZARATE	8
III. THE WOUND	13
IV. THE SQUATTER'S SHANTY	15
V. THE RANGERS	18
VI. THE VALLEY OF THE BUFFALO	21
VII. THE ASSASSINATION	24
VIII. THE SACHEM OF THE CORAS	27
IX. CONVERSATION	30
X. THE WINE SHOP.	33
XI. THE TWO HUNTERS	39
XII. TWO VARIETIES OF VILLAINS	41
XIII. UNICORN	47
XIV. THE HUNT OF THE WILD HORSES	50
XV. THE ABDUCTION	58
XVI. THE REVOLT	61
XVII. EL RANCHO DE COYOTE	64
XVIII. THE CUCHILLADA	66
XIX. THE HUNTERS	69
XX. SUNBEAM	72
XXI. THE MISSIONARY	75
XXII. THE INTERVIEW	78
XXIII. THE PRISON	80
XXIV. THE EMBASSY	83
XXV. THE PRESENTATION	85
XXVI. PSYCHOLOGICAL	87
XXVII. DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND	89
XXVIII. A STORMY DISCUSSION	92
XXIX. THE MYSTERY	95
XXX. THE AMBUSCADE	98
XXXI. A FRIENDLY DISCUSSION	100
XXXII. NATHAN	102
XXXIII. THE WOUNDED MAN	105
XXXIV. INDIAN DIPLOMACY	107
XXXV. THE STRANGER	110
XXXVI. GENERAL VENTURA	113
XXXVII. THE COMANCHES	115
XXXVIII. NEGOTIATIONS	117
XXXIX. FREE	119
XL. THE MEETING	121
XLI. DONA CLARA	124
XLII. EL VADO DEL TORO	126

THE TRAIL-HUNTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE JAGUARS.

ON a lovely morning in the month of May, which the Indians call "the moon of the flowers," a man of high stature, with harsh and marked features, mounted on a tall, half-tamed steed, started at a canter from the plaza, or village, of the Paso, and after a few minutes of hesitation, employed in realising his position, resolutely buried his spurs in the horse's flanks, crossed the ford, and after leaving behind him the numerous cotton-wood trees which at this spot cover the river banks, proceeded toward the dense forest that flashed on the horizon.

This horseman wore a pelisse of green cloth, embroidered with silver, allowing a glimpse of an elegantly-worked shirt, the collar of which was fastened by a loosely-knotted black silk handkerchief, the ends passed through a diamond ring. He wore green cloth breeches, trimmed with silver, and two rows of buttons of the same metal, and fastened round the hips by a red silken scarf with gold fringe. The breeches, open on the side half way up the thigh, displayed his fine linen drawers beneath; his legs were defended by a strip of brown embossed and stamped leather, called *botas vaqueras*, attached below the knee by a silver garter. On his heels enormous spurs clanked. A manga, glistening with gold, and drawn up on the shoulder, protected the upper part of his body, while his head was sheltered from the burning sunbeams by a broad-leaved hat of brown stamped felt, the crown of which was contracted by a large silver *toquilla* passed twice or thrice round it.

His steed was caparisoned with graceful luxuriousness, which heightened all its beautiful points: a rich saddle of embossed leather, adorned with massive silver, on the back of which the *zarape* was fastened; wide Moorish silver stirrups, and handsome water bottles at the saddie-bow; while an elegant *anquera*, made of openwork leather, and decorated with small steel chains, entirely covered the horse's croop, and sparkled with its slightest movement.

The stranger appeared, judging from the luxury he displayed, to belong to the high class of society. A *machete* hung down his right side, two pistols were passed through his girdle, the handle of a long knife protruded from his right boot, and he held a superbly damascened rifle across the saddle in front of him.

Bending over the neck of his steed, the stranger galloped on, with his eye ardently fixed before him, and not appearing to see anything. Several hours passed thus: the horseman buried himself deeper in the forest. He merely reined up his horse now and then, took a glance at the sky, and then started again, muttering to himself but one word—

"*Adelante!*" (Forward!)

At length he stopped in a vast clearing, took a suspicious glance around him, and probably reassured by the leaden silence which weighed on the desert, he dismounted, hobbled his horse, and took off its bridle that it might browse on the young tree-shoots. This duty accomplished, he carelessly lay down on the ground, rolled a maize cigarette in his fingers, produced a gold mechero from his waist-belt, and struck a light, muttering, as he did so—

"Hum! he keeps me waiting a long time."

Several hours passed, when suddenly a rather loud rustling was heard in the thicket, some distance behind the stranger.

"Come on, hang it!" the horseman shouted as he rose. "By our Lady of Pilar! you have surely been keeping me waiting long enough."

Nothing appeared, and the stranger, surprised at the obstinate silence of the man he was addressing, at length rose to see for himself the reason. At this moment his horse pricked up its ears, snorted violently, and made prodigious bounds in order to escape from the lasso that held it. The stranger, more and more surprised, looked round for an explanation of these extraordinary movements.

Scarce twenty yards from him a magnificent jaguar was crouched on the main branch of an enormous cypress, and fixed on him two ferocious eyes, as it passed its blood-red, rugged tongue over its lips with a feline pleasure.

"Ah, ah!" the stranger said to himself, "I did not expect you; but no matter, you are welcome, comrade. *Carai!* we shall have a fight for it."

Without taking his eye off the jaguar, he convinced himself that his machete was loose in its scabbard, picked up his rifle, and then advanced resolutely toward the ferocious brute. The jaguar drew itself together and prepared to leap forward. At the same moment a hoarse yell was heard from the opposite side of the clearing.

"Wait a minute," the stranger said to himself with a smile; "it seems there are two of them, and I fancied I had to do with a bachelor jaguar. This is beginning to grow interesting."

Glancing on one side, he found he had not deceived himself: a second jaguar, rather larger than the first, had fixed its flashing eyes upon him.

The stranger was but slightly affected by the unexpected presence of the jaguars. Although his position between his ferocious enemies was somewhat precarious, he did not the less resolve to confront them bravely. Not taking his eye off the jaguar he had first seen, he went back a few steps obliquely, so as to have his foes nearly opposite him, instead of standing between them. The jaguars watched him, licking their lips, and passing their paws behind their ears with those graceful movements peculiar to the feline race.

While keeping his eye on the watch, the Mexican did not yield to any weak feeling of security: he knew that the struggle he was about to undertake was a supreme one, and he took his precautions. Jaguars never attack a man unless forced by necessity; and the latter tried, before all, to seize the horse. The noble animal, securely fastened by its master, exhausted itself in efforts to break the bonds that held it, and escape. It trembled with terror on scenting its ferocious enemies.

The stranger, when his precautions were completely taken, again shouldered his rifle, and at this moment the jaguars raised their heads, laying back their ears and sniffing. An almost imperceptible sound was audible in the bushes.

"Who goes there?" the Mexican asked in a loud voice.

"A friend, Don Miguel Zarate," was the reply.

"Ah! it is Don Valentine," the Mexican continued. "You have arrived just in time to see some fine sport."

The branches were sharply drawn aside, and two men appeared in the clearing. At the sight of the jaguars they stopped, not through alarm, for they quietly

placed the butts of their rifles on the ground, but in order to give the hunter every facility to emerge victorious from his rash combat.

The jaguars seemed to comprehend that the moment for action had arrived. As if by one accord, they drew themselves up and bounded on their enemy. The first, struck in its leap by a bullet which passed through its right eye, rolled on the ground, where it remained motionless. The second was received on the point of the hunter's machete, who, after discharging his rifle, had fallen on his knee, with his left arm folded in his blanket in front, and the machete in the other hand. The man and the tiger writhed together in a deadly embrace, and after a few seconds only one of the adversaries rose: it was the man. The tiger was dead: the hunter's machete, guided by a firm hand had passed right through its heart.

The Mexican then rose, thrust his machete thrice into the grass to clean the blade, and turning coldly to the strangers, said,—

"What do you say to that?"

"Splendidly played," the first answered; "it is one of the best double strokes I ever saw in my life."

The two men threw their rifles on their shoulders, and walked up to the Mexican, who was reloading his piece with the utmost coolness.

The sun was sinking on the horizon, the shadow of the trees assumed a prodigious length, and the luminary appeared like a ball of fire amid the limpid azure of the heavens. The night would soon arrive, and the desert was awaking.

The three men collected dry branches, made a pile of them, and set fire to it. So soon as the flames rose joyously skyward in long spirals, the two strangers produced from their game bags maize tortillas, jerked meat, and a gourd of pulque. These various comestibles were spread out on the grass, and the three men began a hunter's meal. When the gourd had gone the round several times, and the tortillas had disappeared, the new comers lit their Indian pipes, and the Mexican rolled a papelito.

Although this meal had been short, it lasted however long enough for night to have completely set in. The rudy reflections of the fire played on the energetic faces of the three men, and gave them a fantastic appearance.

"And now," the Mexican said, after lighting his cigarette, "I will, with your permission, explain to you why I was so anxious to see you."

"One moment," one of the hunters answered. "You know that in the desert the leaves have often eyes, and the trees ears. If I am not mistaken in your hints, you invited us here that our interview might be secret."

"In truth, I have the greatest interest in nothing of what is said here being overheard, or even suspected."

"Very good. Curumilla, to your work."

The second hunter rose, seized his rifle, and disappeared noiselessly in the gloom.

In about half an hour the hunter returned, however, and seated himself by his comrades' side.

"Well?" the one who had sent him off asked him.

"My brothers can speak," he replied laconically; "the desert is quiet."

On this assurance the three men banished all anxiety. Still prudence did not abandon them: they took up their pipes, and turned their backs to the fire, so that they might watch the neighbourhood while conversing."

"We are ready to listen to you," the first hunter said.

"Listen to me with the greatest attention," the Mexican began; "what you are about to hear is of the utmost importance."

Before going further we must introduce to the reader the two men we have just brought on the stage, and go back a few paces.

The two hunters seemed at the first glance to be Indians; but, on examining them more attentively, you could recognise that one of them belonged to those white

trappers whose boldness has become proverbial in Mexico. Their appearance and equipment offered a singular medley of savage and civilized life. Their hair was of a remarkable length; for in those countries, where a man is frequently only fought for the glory of lifting his scalp, it is considered the thing to wear it long and easy to seize.

The hunters had their hair neatly plaited, and intertwined with beaver skins and bright-coloured ribbons. The rest of their garb harmonized with this specimen of their taste. A hunting shirt of bright red calico fell down to their knees; gaiters decorated with woollen ribbons and bells surrounded their legs; and their feet were shod with mocassins embroidered with beads, which the squaws know so well how to make. A striped blanket, fastened round the hips by a belt of tanned deer-hide, completed their clothing, but was not so closely drawn that at their every movement the butt of the pistols and the hilt of the machetes might be seen glistening. As for their rifles, useless at this moment, and carelessly thrown on the ground by their side, if they had been stripped of the plume-worked elk-skin that covered them, it would have been possible to see with what care their owners had decorated them with copper nails, painted of various colours; for all about these two men bore the imprint of Indian habits.

The first of the two hunters was a man of thirty-eight at the most, tall and well built: his muscular limbs denoted great bodily strength, allied to unequalled lightness. Although he affected all the manners of the red-skins, it was an easy matter to perceive that he not only belonged to the unmixed white race, but also to the Norman or Gaulish type. He was fair; his large blue, and pensive eyes, adorned with long lashes, had an expression of undefinable sadness; his nose was slightly aquiline; his mouth large, and filled with teeth of dazzling whiteness; a thick chestnut beard covered the lower part of his face, which revealed gentleness, kindness, and courage without boasting, though the whole were combined with a will of iron.

His companion evidently belonged to the Indian race, all the characteristic signs of which he displayed; but, strange to say, he was not coppery like the American aborigines of Texas and North America; his skin was brown, and slightly of an olive hue. He had a lofty brow, a bent nose, small but piercing eyes, a large mouth, and square chin; in short, he presented the complete type of the Araucano race, which inhabits a limited territory in the south of Chili. This hunter had round his brow a purple coloured fillet, in which was thrust over the right ear a plume of the Andes eagle, a sign which serves to distinguish the chiefs of the Aucas.

These two men, whom the reader has doubtless already recognised, as they played an important part in our previously published works, were Valentine Guillois, ~~ex-~~noncommissi ned officer in the Spahis, and Curumilla, his friend,—Ulmen of the Great Hare tribe.

CHAPTER II.

DON MIGUEL ZARATE.

WERE Mexico better governed, it would be one of the richest countries on the face of the globe. Indeed, the largest private fortunes must still be sought in that country. Since the United States Americans have revealed to the world, by seizing one half of Mexico, whither their ambition tends, the inhabitants of that fine country have slightly emerged from the torpor they enjoyed, and have made great efforts to colonise their provinces, and summon to their soil, which is so rich and fertile, intelligent and industrious labourers, who might change the face of affairs

and cause abundance and wealth to abound at spots where, prior to their arrival, there was naught save ruin, desolation, carelessness, and misery.

Among the New Mexican land-owners who resolved to make great sacrifices in order to stop, or at least check, the imminent invasion from North America, the richest, and possibly, first of all, through his intelligence and the influence he justly enjoyed in the country, was Don Miguel Acamarichtzin Zarate.

Whatever may be asserted, the Indian population of Mexico is nearly five to one white men, and possesses an enormous influence. Don Miguel descended in a strait line from Acamarichtzin, first king of Mexico, whose name had been preserved in the family as a precious relic. Possessed of an incalculable fortune, Don Miguel lived on his enormous estates like a king in his empire, beloved and respected by the Indians, whom he effectively protected whenever the occasion presented itself, and who felt for him a veneration carried almost to idolatry; for they saw in him the descendant from one of their most celebrated kings, and the born defender of their race.

The family of Don Miguel Zarate had retired to New Mexico, which country it did not leave again, a few years after the conquests of the adventurer Cortez. Don Miguel had closely followed the policy of his family by maintaining the bonds of friendship and good neighborhood which, from time immemorial, attached it to the Indians. This policy had borne its fruit. Annually, in September, when the terrible red warriors, preceded by murder and arson, rushed like a torrent on the wretched inhabitants, whom they massacred in the farms they plundered, without pity for age or sex, only Don Miguel Zarate's estates were respected.

This conduct of the Indians had not failed to arouse extreme jealousy on the part of the inhabitants, who saw themselves periodically ruined by the *Indios Bravos*. Earnest complaints had been laid against Don Miguel before the Mexican Government; but whatever might be the power of his enemies, and the means they employed to ruin him, the rich hacendero had never been seriously disturbed.

Don Miguel was left a widower after eight years' marriage, with two children, a boy and a girl, the son being twenty-four, the daughter seventeen, at the period when this story opens. Dona Clara—such was the daughter's name—was one of the most delicious maidens that can be imagined. She had one of those Murillo's virgin heads, whose black eyes, fringed with long silky lashes, pure mouth, and creamy brow seem to promise divine joys. Her complexion, slightly bronzed by the warm sunbeams, wore that gilded reflection which so well becomes the women of these intertropical countries. She was short of stature, but exquisitely modelled. Gentle and simple, ignorant as a Creole, this delicious child was adored by her father, who saw in her the wife he had so loved living once more. The Indians looked after her when she at times passed pensively, plucking a flower before their wretched huts, and scarce bending the plants on which she placed her delicate foot. In their hearts they compared this frail maiden, with her soft and vaporous outline, to the "virgin of the first loves," that sublime creation of the Indian religion which holds so great a place in the Aztec mythology.

Don Pablo Zarate, the hacendero's son, was a powerfully built man, with harshly-marked features, and a haughty glance, although at times it was imprinted with gentleness and kindness. Endowed with more than ordinary strength, skilled in all bodily exercises, Don Pablo was renowned through the whole country for his talent in taming horses, and the correctness of his aim when on the chase. A determined hunter and daring wood-ranger, this young man, when he had a good horse between his legs, and his rifle in his hand, knew no man or animal, capable of barring his passage. The Indians, in their simple faith, yielded to the son the same respect and veneration they entertained for the father, and fancied they saw in him the personification of *Huitzilopochtli*, that terrible war god of the Aztecs, to whom

62,000 human victims were sacrificed in one day, upon the inauguration of his *teocali*.

Don Miguel possessed, in the vicinity of the Paso, vast estates extending for a great distance, and consisting principally of haciendas, prairies and forests. One day Don Miguel was returning from a visit to his haciendas. It was late, and he pressed on his horse in order to reach the ford ere night, when, at about three or four leagues at the most from the spot to which he was proceeding, and just as he was entering a dense forest of cotton-wood trees, through which he must pass ere reaching the ford, his attention was attracted by cries mingled with growls emerging from the wood he was about to enter. The hacendero stopped in order to account for the unusual sounds he heard, and bent his head forward to detect what was happening. In the mean while the noise grew louder, and the shouts were redoubled, and mingled with oaths and passionate exclamations.

The Mexican's horse laid back its ears, neighed, and refused to advance. Thinking that a man was probably attacked by wild beasts, he compelled his steed to go forward and enter the wood. He had scarce gone a few yards ere he stopped in amazement at the strange spectacle that presented itself to him.

In the middle of a clearing lay a tipped-up horse, which six or eight peccaris were rending, while a dozen others were attacking with their tusks the stem of an enormous tree, in the topmost branches of which a man had sought shelter.

The peccaris hold the intermediate grade between the domestic pig and the wild boar. Although this animal does not exceed two feet in height, and is not more than three feet long from the end of the snout to the beginning of the tail, it is one of the most dangerous animals in North America. The animal's jaw is provided with tusks rather like those of the boar, but straight and sharp, their length varying between four and six inches.

The movements of the peccaris are as quick and sharp as those of the squirrel. They ordinarily live in herds of fifteen, thirty, and even fifty. A remarkable peculiarity of this genus is the clumsy wart they have on their backs, whence a musky fluid evaporates when the animal is in a fury.

The peccari lives in preference on acorns, roots, wheat, sugar cane, and reptiles of every description.

The mode in which the peccari forms its lair is very singular, generally being in the midst of tufted and impenetrable canes, in marshy spots round the monarchs of the forest, which still stand like crushed giants, with their grappling lines of creepers and virgin vines. The trunks of these trees, which at times measure forty feet in circumference, are nearly all hollow, and thus afford a convenient shelter for the peccaris, which retire to them every night in herds of twenty to twenty-five, entering the cavity one after the other backwards; so that the last has the end of its snout placed just at the entrance of the hole, thus watching, as it were, over the rest of its companions.

The peccaris are exceedingly ferocious; they despise danger. They always attack in herds, and fight with unequalled rage until the last succumbs, no matter the nature of their foe. Hence men and animals all fly from these terrible beasts: the jaguar, so strong and redoubtable, will become their prey if it be so imprudent as to attack them. This is the way they set about conquering this wild beast:—

When a jaguar has wounded a peccari, the latter collect, chase it, and pursue until they can contrive to surround the common enemy. When every issue is closed, the jaguar, believing it can thus escape, seeks refuge up a tree. But the peccaris establish themselves at the foot of the tree, being incessantly recruited by fresh allies, and patiently waiting till the jaguar, driven to extremities by hunger and thirst, decides on descending from its improvised fortress. The jaguar bounds

into the midst of its enemies, and a terrible fight commences ; and the tiger, after covering the ground with victims, at length succumbs beneath the efforts of its assailants, and is ripped up by their tusks.

After what we have said, it is easy to understand how precarious was the position of the man perched on the top of the tree and surrounded by peccaris. His enemies craftily crept round the tree, attacked its base with their tusks, and then recognising the inutility of their onsets, they quietly lay down by the carcass of the horse, which they had already sacrificed to their fury. Don Miguel felt moved to pity for the poor fellow, whose position grew momentarily more critical. What was to be done ? How, without sacrificing himself, save the man who ran so great a risk ?

The Mexican hesitated for a long period. It seemed to Don Miguel impossible to leave this man without help. This idea, which presented itself to his mind several times, he had energetically repulsed, so monstrous did it appear to him.

The stranger's position was the more critical because, in his haste to defend himself from the attacks of his enemies, he had let his rifle fall at the foot of the tree, and was consequently unable to reduce their number. In spite of the fineness of scent, the latter had not noticed Don Miguel's approach, who, by a providential accident, had entered the wood on the side opposite the wind. The Mexican dismounted, patted his horse, and then took off its accoutrements. The noble animal, habituated to his master's caresses, shook its head joyously, and fixed its large intelligent eyes on him. Don Miguel could not repress another sigh ; a tear fell down his bronzed cheeks. On the point of accomplishing the sacrifice, he hesitated.

It was a faithful companion, almost a friend, he was about to separate from ; but the life of a man was at stake. The Mexican drove back the feelings that agitated him, and his resolution was formed. He passed a lasso round his horse's neck, and in spite of its obstinate resistance, compelled it to advance to the entrance of the clearing, in which the peccaris were assembled. A frail curtain of creepers and leaves alone hid it from their sight. On arriving here Don Miguel stopped : he had one more moment's hesitation, but only one ; for then seizing a bit of tinder, which he lighted, he thrust it into the poor animal's ear while caressing it.

The effect was sudden and terrible. The horse uttered a snort of pain ; and rendered mad by the burning, bounded forward into the clearing, striving in vain to get rid of the tinder which caused it intolerable suffering. Don Miguel had smartly leaped aside, and now followed with an anxious glance the result of the terrible tentative he had just made to save the stranger. On seeing the horse appear suddenly in their midst, the peccaris rose, formed a compact group, and rushed with their head down in pursuit of the horse, thinking no longer of the man. The animal, spurred on still more by the sight of its ferocious enemies, shot ahead with the speed of an arrow, breaking down with its chest all the obstacles in its way, and followed closely by the peccaris.

The man was saved ; but at what a price ! The stranger had already descended from the tree ; but the emotion he had undergone was so extreme, that he remained seated on the ground, almost in a state of unconsciousness.

"Quick, quick !" Don Miguel said to him sharply. "We have not a moment to lose : the peccaris may alter their minds and return."

"That is true," the stranger muttered in a hollow voice. "Let us be off—off at once."

He made an effort over himself, seized his rifle, and rose. Through a presentiment for which he could not account to himself, Don Miguel experienced at the sight of this man, whom he had hitherto scarce looked at, a feeling of invincible doubt and disgust.

Still he did not allow his feelings to be seen through, and invited this man to follow him. The latter did not let the invitation be repeated; for he was anxious to escape from the spot where he had been so near death. Thanks to the Mexican's acquaintance with the country, the wood was speedily traversed, and the two men, after a walk of scarce an hour's duration, reached the banks of the Del Norte, just opposite the village. Their speed had been so great, their anxiety so serious, that they had not exchanged a syllable, so terrified were they at the idea of seeing the peccaris reappear. Fortunately this was not the case, and they reached the ford without being again disturbed.

Don Miguel was burdened with his horse's trappings, which he now threw on the ground, and looked around him in the hope of finding some one who would help him in crossing the river. His expectations were not deceived; for just as they reached the ford an *arriero* was preparing to cross to the other side of the river with his *recca* of mules, and, with the generosity innate in all Mexicans, he offered to carry them both to the Paso. The two men eagerly accepted, each mounted a mule, and half an hour later they found themselves in safety at the village. After giving the *arriero* a few reals to requite him for his services, Don Miguel took up his horse's trappings again, and prepared to start. The stranger stopped.

"We are about to part here, caballero," he said in a rough voice, with a very marked English accent; "but, before leaving let me express to you my deep gratitude for the noble and generous manner in which you saved my life at the peril of your own."

"Sir," the Mexican simply answered, "I only did my duty. In the desert all men are brothers, and owe each other protection; any other in my place would have acted as I have done."

"Perhaps so," the stranger continued; "but be kind enough, pray, to tell me your name, so that I may know to whom I owe my life."

"That is needless," Don Miguel said with a smile; "let me give you a piece of advice."

"What is it, sir?"

"Never in future to attack the peccaris. They are terrible enemies, only to be conquered by a strong body of men."

"Be assured, sir, that I shall profit by the lesson I have received this day, and shall never put myself in such a wasp's nest again. But I beg you, sir, do not let us separate ere I know the name of my preserver."

"As you insist, sir, you shall learn it. I am Don Miguel de Zarate."

"Ah!" he said in a singular tone, "thanks, Don Miguel Zarate. Without knowing you personally, I was already acquainted with your name."

"That is possible," the *haciendero* answered; for I am well known in this country."

"I, sir, am he whom the Indians call Wilchasta Jonté, the Man-eater, and the hunters Red Cedar."

And after lifting his hand to his cap in salute, this man threw his rifle on his shoulder, turned on his heel, and went off at full speed. Don Miguel looked after him for a while, and then walked pensively toward the house he inhabited at Paso. The *haciendero* did not suspect that he had sacrificed his favourite horse to save the life of his most implacable enemy.

CHAPTER III.

THE WOUND.

NEXT day Don Miguel, mounted on an excellent horse, left the Paso, and proceeded toward the hacienda where he resided. It was situated a few miles from the Presidio of San Elezario, in a delicious position, and was known as the *Hacienda de la Noria* (the Farm of the Well). The estate inhabited by Don Miguel stood in the centre of the vast delta formed by the Del Norte and the Rio San Pedro, or Devil's River. It was one of those strong and massive buildings which the Spaniards alone knew how to erect when they were absolute masters of Mexico.

The hacienda formed a vast parallelogram, supported at regular distances by enormous cross walls of carved stone. Like all the frontier habitations, which are rather fortresses than houses, it was only pierced on the side of the plain with a few narrow windows resembling loopholes, and protected by solid iron bars. This abode was begirt by a thick wall of circumvallation, defended on the top by that fretwork called *almenas*, which indicated the nobility of the owner. Within this wall, but separated from the chief apartments, were the stables, outhouses, barns, and cabins for the peons.

At the extremity of the courtyard, in an angle of the hacienda, was the tall square belfry of the chapel, rising above its terraced roof. This chapel was served by a monk called Fray Ambrosio. A magnificent plain closed in this splendid farm. At the end of a valley more than fifty miles in length were cactus trees of a conical shape, loaded with fruit and flowers, and whose stems were as much as six feet in diameter.

Don Miguel employed a considerable number of peons in the cultivation of the sugar cane, which he carried on upon a large scale.

Don Miguel advanced rapidly at the favourite pace of the Mexican *ginetas*, a peculiar sort of amble which is very gentle and rapid. He was received on the threshold of the house by his daughter, who, warned of his arrival, had hastened to meet him.

Don Miguel had been absent from home for a fortnight; hence he received his daughter's caresses with the greatest pleasure. When he had embraced her several times, while continuing to hold her tightly clasped in his arms, he regarded her attentively.

"What is the matter, *mi querida* Clara?" he asked with sympathy. "Can you feel vexed at the sight of me?"

"Oh, you cannot believe that, father?" she answered quickly; "for you know how happy your presence must render me."

"Thanks, my child! But whence, in that case, comes the sorrow I see spread over your features?"

The maiden let her eyes sink, but made no reply. Don Miguel threw a searching glance round.

"Where is Don Pablo?" he said, "Can he be away from the hacienda?"

"No, father, he is here."

"Well, then, what is the reason he is not by your side?"

"He is ill."

"My son ill!" Don Miguel exclaimed.

"My father, the fact is that Pablo is wounded."

"Wounded!" the hacendero sharply said; and thrusting his daughter aside, he rushed towards the house, bounded up the few steps leading to the porch, crossed several rooms without stopping, and reached his son's chamber. The young man

was lying weak and faint, on his bed ; but on perceiving his parent he smiled, and held his hand to him.

"What is this wound of which I have heard?" the father asked in great agitation.

"Less than nothing father," the young man replied. "Clara is a foolish girl, who, in her tenderness, wrongly alarmed you."

"But, after all, you are wounded?" the father continued.

"But I repeat that it is a mere nothing."

"Come, explain yourself. How and when did you receive this wound? I insist on knowing."

"Good heavens, father!" Don Pablo replied with an air of ill-humour. "I do not understand why you are alarmed for so futile a cause. I am not a child whom a scratch should make frightened."

"That is possible; but the mode in which you answer me, the care you seem trying to take to keep me ignorant of the cause of this wound—in a word, every thing tells me that this time you are trying to hide something."

"You are mistaken, father, and shall convince yourself."

"I wish nothing more: speak. Clara, my child, go and give orders to have breakfast prepared, for I am dying of hunger."

The girl went out.

"Now it is our turn," Don Miguel continued. "In the first place, where are you wounded?"

"Oh! I have merely a slight scratch on my shoulder."

"Hum! and what scratched your shoulder?"

"A bullet."

"What! a bullet? Then you must have fought a duel, unhappy boy!" Don Miguel exclaimed with a shudder.

The young man smiled, pressed his father's hand, and bending toward him, said,—

"This is what has happened. Two days after your departure, father, I was superintending the cutting of the cane crop, when a hunter whom you will probably remember having seen prowling about the estate, a man of the name of *Andrès Garote*, accosted me at the moment I was about to return home after giving my orders to the majordomo. After saluting me obsequiously, the scamp smiled cunningly, and lowering his voice so as not to be overheard by those around us said, 'Don Pablo, I fancy you would give half an ounce to the man who brought you important news?' 'That depends,' I answered; for having known the man a long time, I was aware much confidence could not be placed in him. 'Bah! your Grace is so rich,' he continued insidiously, 'that a miserable sum like that is less than nothing in his pocket, while in mine it would do me a deal of good.'

"Apart from his defects, this scamp had at times done us a few small services; and then, as he said, a half-ounce is but a trifle, so I gave it to him. He stowed it away in his pockets, and then bent down to my ear. 'Thanks, Don Pablo,' he said to me. 'I shall not cheat you of your money. Your horse is rested, and can stand a long journey. Proceed to Buffalo Valley, and there you will learn something to interest you.' It was in vain that I urged him to explain himself more clearly; I could draw no more from him. He merely added before parting from me, 'Don Pablo, you have good weapons; so take them with you, for no man knoweth what may happen.' Somehow the scamp's veiled confidences aroused my curiosity: hence I resolved to go to Buffalo Valley, and gain the clue of this riddle."

"*Andrès Garote* is a villain, who laid a snare for you into which you fell," Don Miguel interrupted.

"No, father. *Andrès* was honest toward me, and I have only thanks to give him. Still he should have explained himself, perhaps, more distinctly."

"Go on," said the *haciendero*.

"I entered the house, procured my weapons, and then, mounted on Negro, my black charger, I proceeded toward Buffalo Valley. As you are aware, father, the place we call so, and which belongs to us, is an immense forest of cedars and maples, nearly forty miles in circumference, and traversed almost through its entire length by a wide confluent of the Rio San Pedro."

"Of course I know it, and I intend next year to fell some of the wood there."

"You need not take that trouble," the young man said with a smile, "for some one else has done it for you."

"What do you mean?" the *haciendero* asked wrathfully. "Who has dared?"

"O! one of those wretched heretic squatters, as they call themselves. The villain found the spot to suit him, and has quietly settled there with his whelps—three big fellows with hang-dog faces, who laughed at me when I told them that the forest was mine, and answered, while aiming at me, that they were North Americans, who cared as little for me as they did for a coyote. What more shall I tell you, father? I take after you. I have hot blood, and I cordially hate the race of Yankee pirates, who, for some years back, have settled on our lovely country like a swarm of musquitos. I saw our forest plundered, our finest trees cut down. I could not remain unmoved in the presence of these scoundrels' insolence, and the quarrel became so sharp that they fired at me."

"*Virgen Santissima!*" Don Miguel exclaimed in fury, "they shall pay dearly for the affront they have offered you, I swear it!"

"Why be so angry, father?" the young man replied, visibly annoyed at the effect his story had produced. "The harm these people do us is really very trifling. I was in the wrong to let my passion carry me away."

"On the contrary, you were right. I will not have these Northern thieves come and plunder here."

"I assure you that, if you will leave me to act, I feel certain of arranging this affair to your satisfaction."

"I forbid you taking the slightest steps, for this matter concerns me now. Will you promise me?"

"As you insist, I do so, father."

"Very good. Get cured as speedily as possible, and keep your mind at rest. The Yankees shall pay me dearly for the blood they have shed."

With these words Don Miguel retired, and his son fell back on his bed stifling a sigh.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SQUATTER'S SHANTY.

DON PABLO had not told his father the facts in all their truth. He had fallen into a perfect ambuscade. He was suddenly attacked by the three brothers, who would have mercilessly killed him, resolved to lay the blame of his death on the wild beasts, had not, at the moment when one of them lifted his knife on the young man, who was thrown down and rendered motionless by the others, a providential succour reached him in the person of a charming maid scarce sixteen years of age.

The courageous girl rushed from a copse, and threw herself resolutely into the midst of the assassins.

"What are you about, brothers?" she exclaimed in a melodious voice. "Why do you wish to kill this stranger?"

The three squatters, surprised by this apparition, which they were far from expecting, fell back a few paces. Don Pablo profited by this truce to regain possession of his arms, which had fallen by his side.

"Was it not enough," the girl continued, "to rob this man, that you must now try to take his life? Fie, brothers! Do you not know that blood leaves on the hands of him who spills it stains which nothing can efface? Let this man retire in peace."

The young men hesitated. Although unconsciously yielding to their sister's influence, they were ashamed of thus executing her wishes.

"Ellen is right," the youngest of her brothers suddenly said. "No, I will not allow any harm to be done to the stranger."

The others looked at him savagely.

"You would defend him, if necessary, I suppose, Shaw?" Nathan said to him ironically.

"Why should I not, were it required?" the young man said boldly.

"Eh!" Sutter remarked with a grin; he is thinking of the Wood Eglantine."

This word had been scarce uttered ere Shaw, with purpled face, contracted features, and eyes injected with blood, rushed with uplifted knife on his brother, who awaited him firmly. The girl dashed between them.

"Peace, peace," she shrieked in a piercing voice. "Do brothers dare threaten one another?"

The two young fellows remained motionless, but watching, and ready to strike in a moment. Don Pablo fixed an ardent glance on the girl, who was really admirable at this moment.

In her whole person she offered the complete type of the gentle northern woman. Her hair light and golden like ripe corn; her eyes of extreme purity, which reflected the azure of the sky; her earnest mouth, with rosy lips and pearly teeth; her flexible and small waist; the whiteness of her complexion, whose delicate and transparent skin still bore the flush of adolescence—all was combined in this charming maiden to render her the most seductive creature imaginable.

Don Pablo felt himself involuntarily attracted toward the girl.

This young creature, so frail and delicate, formed a strange contrast with the tall statures and marked features of her brothers, whose coarse and savage manners only served to heighten the elegance and charm exhaled by her whole person. Still this scene could not be prolonged, and must be ended at once. The maiden walked toward Don Pablo.

"Sir," she said to him with a soft smile, "you have nothing more to fear from my brothers; you can mount your horse again, and set out, and no one will oppose your departure."

The young man understood that he had no pretext to prolong his stay at this spot; he therefore let his head sink, placed his pistols in his holsters, leaped on his horse, and set out with regret.

He had scarce gone a league when he heard the hasty clatter of a horse behind him. He turned back. The approaching horseman was Shaw, who soon caught up with Don Pablo. The pair then proceeded some distance side by side without exchanging a syllable, and both seemed plunged in thought. On reaching the skirt of the forest, Shaw checked his horse, and softly laid his right hand on the Mexican's bridle. Don Pablo also stopped on this hint, and waited, while fixing an inquiring glance on his strange comrade.

"Stranger," the young man said, "my sister sends me. She implores you, if it be possible, to keep secret what has occurred between us to-day. She deeply regrets

the attack to which you fell a victim, and the wound you have received ; and she will try to persuade Red Cedar, our father, to retire from your estates."

"Thank your sister for me." Don Pablo answered, "Tell her that her slightest wish will ever be a command."

"I will repeat your words to her."

"Thanks. Render me a parting service."

"Speak."

"What is your sister's name?"

"Ellen. She is the guardian angel of our hearth. My name is Shaw."

"I am obliged to you for telling me your name, though I cannot guess the reason that induces you to do so."

"I will tell you. I love my sister Ellen before all : she urged me to offer you my friendship. I obey her."

"I shall not forget it, though I hope never to be under the necessity of reminding you of your words."

"All the worse," the American said with a shake of his head? "but if at any time the opportunity offers, I will prove to you that I am a man of my word."

And hurriedly turning his horse's head, the young man rapidly disappeared in the windings of the forest.

Buffalo Valley, illumined by the parting rays of the setting sun, seemed a lake of verdure to which the golden mist of night imparted magical tones. A light breeze rustled through the lofty crests of the cedars, catalpas, tulip and Peru trees, and agitated the grass on the banks of the Rio San Pedro. Don Pablo let the reins float idly on his horse's neck, and advanced dreamily through the forest, where the birds were leaping from spray to spray, each saluting in its language the arrival of night.

An hour later the young man reached the hacienda ; but the wound he had received in his shoulder was more serious than was at first supposed.

So soon as the Mexican had gone off, the squatters continued felling trees and sawing planks, and did not abandon this work till the night had grown quite black. Ellen had returned to the interior of the jacal, where she attended to the house-keeping duties with her mother. The jacal was a wretched hut, hastily made with branches of intertwined trees, which trembled with every breeze, and let the sun and rain penetrate to the interior.

This cabin was divided into three compartments ; the one to the right served as the bedroom of the two females, while the men slept in the one to the left. The central compartment furnished with worm-eaten benches and a clumsily-planed table, was at once keeping-room and kitchen.

It was late : the squatters assembled round the fire, over which a huge iron pot was boiling, were silently awaiting the return of Red Cedar, who had been absent since the morning. At length a horse's hoofs sounded sharply on the detritus collected for years on the floor of the forest, the noise grew gradually nearer, the horse stopped in front of the jacal, and a man made his appearance. It was Red Cedar. The men slowly turned their heads toward him, but did not otherwise disturb themselves, or address a syllable to him.

Ellen alone rose and embraced her father affectionately. The giant seized the girl in his nervous arms, raised her from the ground, and kissed her several times, saying, in his rough voice, which his tenderness sensibly softened,—

"Good evening, my dear."

Then he put her down on the ground again, and not troubling himself further about her, fell heavily on a bench near the fire.

"Come, wife," he said, after the expiration of a moment, "the supper, in the fiend's name!"

A few moments later and an immense dish of *frijoles*, with pimento, smoked on the table, with large pots of pulque. The meal was short and silent, the four men eating with extreme voracity. So soon as the beans had disappeared, Red Cedar and his sons lit their pipes, and began smoking, while drinking large draughts of whiskey, though still not speaking. At length Red Cedar took his pipe from his lips, and hit the table sharply, while saying in a rough voice,—

"Come, women, decamp! You have nothing more to do here. You are in our way, so go to the deuce!"

Ellen and her mother immediately went out, and entered their separate apartment. For a few minutes they could be heard moving about, and then all became silent again.

A strange scene then occurred in this mean room, which was merely illumined by the expiring light of the hearth. The four men rose, opened a large chest, and produced from it various objects of strange shapes—leggings, mittens, buffalo robes, collars of grizzly bear claws; in a word, the costumes of Apache Indians, completing the metamorphosis by painting their faces.

The garments which the squatters had taken off were locked up in the chest, of which Red Cedar took the key; and the four men, armed with their American rifles, left the cabin, mounted their horses, which were awaiting them ready saddled, and started at full gallop through the winding forest paths.

CHAPTER V.

THE RANGERS.

On the banks of the Rio San Pedro, and on the side of a hill, stood a *rancheria* composed of some ten cabins, inhabited by a population of about sixty men, women, and children. These people were Coras Indians, hunters and agriculturists, belonging to the Tortoise tribe. These poor Indians lived there on terms of peace with their neighbours. Quiet and inoffensive beings, during the nearly twenty years they had been established at this place, they had never once offered a subject of complaint to their neighbours, who, on the contrary, were glad to see them prosper, owing to their gentle and hospitable manners.

On the night when we saw the squatters leave their cabin in disguise, some twenty individuals, armed to the teeth, and clothed in strange costume, with their faces blackened so as to render them unrecognisable, were bivouacked at about two leagues from the *rancheria*, in a plain on the river's bank. Seated or lying round huge fires, they were singing, laughing, quarrelling, or gambling with multitudinous yells and oaths. Two men, seated apart, at the foot of an enormous cactus, were conversing in a low tone, while smoking their husk cigarettes. These two men, of whom we have already spoken to the reader, were Fray Ambrosio, chaplain to the Hacienda de la Noria, and Andrès Garote, the hunter.

Andrès was a tall, thin fellow, with a sickly and cunning face, who draped himself defiantly in his sordid rags, but whose weapons were in a perfectly good condition.

The men assembled at this moment on the banks of the Rio San Pedro were preparing for a war-party—the name they give to the massacres they organise against the red-skins.

Towards midnight Red Cedar and his three sons reached the rangers' camp. They must have been impatiently expected, for the bandits received them with marks of the greatest joy and the warmest enthusiasm. The dice, cards, and botas

The Rangers.

of mezcal and whiskey were immediately deserted. The rangers mounted their horses, and grouped round the squatters, near whom stood Fray Ambrosio and his friend Andrès Garote.

Red Cedar took a glance round the mob, and could not repress a smile of pride at the sight of the rich collection of bandits of every description whom he had around him, and who recognised him as chief.

"Senores caballeros," he said in a powerful and marked voice, which made all these scamps quiver with delight, "the audacity of the red-skins is growing intolerable. If we let them alone they would soon inundate the country, when they would end by expelling us. This state of things must have an end. The Government complains about the few scalps we supply; it says we do not carry out the clauses of the agreement we have formed with it; it talks about disbanding us, as our services are useless, and therefore burdensome to the Republic. I have assembled you here for a war-party, which I have been meditating for some time. We are about to attack the rancheria of the Coras, who for some years past have had the impudence to establish themselves near this spot. They are pagans and thieves, who have a hundred times merited the severe chastisement we are about to inflict on them. But I implore you, senores caballeros, display no mistaken pity. Crush this race of vipers—let not one escape!"

This harangue was greeted as it deserved to be; that is, by yells of joy.

"Senores," Red Cedar continued, "the worthy monk will now call down the blessings of Heaven on our enterprise; so kneel down to receive his absolution."

The bandits instantaneously dismounted, took off their hats, and knelt on the sand. Fray Ambrosio then repeated a long prayer, to which they listened with exemplary patience, repeating *amen* after each occasion, and he ended by giving them absolution. The rangers rose, delighted at being thus freed from the burden of their sins, and got into their saddles again.

Red Cedar then whispered a few words in Fray Ambrosio's ears, who bowed his head in assent, and immediately set out in the direction of the Hacienda de la Noria, followed by Andrès Garote. The squatter then turned to the rangers, who were awaiting his orders.

"You know where we are going, gentlemen," he said. "Let us start, and, before all, be silent, if we wish to catch our game in its lair."

The gloomy horsemen now went on, silent and frowning. At the end of scarce an hour the rancheria was reached. All were resting in the village—not a light flashed in a hut. The Indians, wearied with the hard toil of the day, were reposing, full of confidence in the sworn faith, and apprehending no treason.

Red Cedar halted twenty yards from the rancheria, and drew up his horsemen so as to surround the village on all sides. When each had taken his post, and the torches were lighted, Red Cedar uttered the terrible war-cry of the Apaches, and the rangers galloped at full speed on the village, uttering ferocious howls, and brandishing the torches, which they threw on the cabins.

The unhappy Indians, surprised in their sleep, rushed terrified and half naked out of their poor abodes, and were pitilessly massacred and scalped by the rangers, who waved with a demoniac laugh their smoking blood-dripping scalps. Men, women, and children, all were killed with refinements of barbarity. The village, fired by the rangers' torches, soon became an immense funereal pile, in which victims and murderers were huddled pell-mell.

Still a few Indians had succeeded in collecting. Formed in a compact troop of twenty men, they opposed a desperate resistance to their assassins, exasperated by the odour of blood and the intoxication of carnage. At the head of this band was a half-nude, tall Indian of intelligent features, who, armed with a ploughshare, which he wielded with extreme force and skill, felled all the assailants who came within

reach of his terrible weapon. This man was the cacique of the Coras. At his feet lays his mother, wife, and two children—dead. The unhappy man struggled with the energy of despair. He knew his life would be sacrificed, but he wished to sell it as dearly as possible.

In vain had the rangers fired on the cacique—he seemed invulnerable: not one of the bullets aimed at him had struck him. He still fought, and the weight of his weapon did not seem to fatigue his arm. The rangers excited each other to finish him; but not one dared to approach him.

But this combat of giants could not endure longer. Of the twenty companions he had round him on commencing the struggle, the cacique now only saw two or three upright: the rest were dead. There must be an end. The circle that inclosed the hapless Indian drew closer and closer. Henceforth it was only a question of time with him. The rangers, recognising the impossibility of conquering this lion-hearted man, had changed their tactics: they no longer attacked him, but contented themselves with forming an impassable circle round him, waiting prudently for the moment when the strength of the prey, which could not escape them, was exhausted, in order to rush upon him.

The Coras understood the intention of his enemies. A contemptuous smile contracted his haughty lips, and he rushed resolutely toward these men who recoiled before him. Suddenly, with a movement quicker than thought, he threw with extraordinary strength the ploughshare among the rangers, and bounding like a panther, leaped on a horse, and clutched its rider with superhuman vigour.

Ere the rangers had recovered from the surprise this unforeseen attack occasioned in them, by a desperate effort, and still holding the horseman, the chieftain drew from his girdle, a short sharp knife, which he buried up to the hilt in the flanks of the horse. The animal uttered a shriek of pain, rushed headlong into the crowd, and bore both away with maddening speed.

The rangers, rendered furious at being played with by a single man, and seeing their most terrible enemy escape them, started in pursuit; but with his liberty the Coras had regained all his energy: he felt himself saved. In spite of the desperate efforts the rangers made to catch him up, he disappeared in the darkness.

The cacique continued to fly till he felt his horse tottering under him. He had not loosed his hold of the horseman, who was half strangled by the rude embrace, and both rolled on the ground. This man wore the costume of the Apache Indians.

"You are not a red-skin," said the Coras in a hollow voice, "you are only a pale-face dog. Why put on the skin of the lion when you are a cowardly coyote?"

The ranger, still stunned by the fall he had suffered, and the hug he had endured, did not reply.

"I could kill you," the Indian continued; "but my vengeance would not be complete. You and yours must pay me for all the innocent blood you have shed like cowards this night. I will mark you, so that I may know you again."

Then, with fearful coolness, the Coras threw the ranger on his back, put his knee on his chest, and burying his finger in the socket of his eye, gave it a sharp rotatory movement, and plucked out his eyeball. On this frightful mutilation the wretch uttered a cry of pain impossible to describe. The Indian got up.

"Go!" he said to him. "Now I am certain of finding you again whenever I want you."

At this moment the sound of hoofs could be heard a short distance off: the rangers had evidently heard their comrade's cry, and were hurrying to his aid. The Coras rushed into the bushes and disappeared. A few moments later the rangers came up.

"Nathan, my son!" Red Cedar shouted, as he leaped from his horse, and threw himself on the body of the wounded man. "Nathan, my first born is dead!"

"No," one of the rangers answered; "but he is very bad."

It was really the squatter's eldest son whom the cacique had mutilated. Red Cedar seized him in his arms, placed him before him on the saddle, and the band started again at a gallop. The rangers had accomplished their task; they had sixty human scalps hanging from their girdles. The rancheria of the Coras was no longer aught save a pile of ashes.

Of all the inhabitants of this hapless village only the cacique survived; but he would suffice to avenge his brothers.

CHAPTER VI.

THE VALLEY OF THE BUFFALO.

DON MIGUEL ZARATE, on leaving his son, remounted his horse and rode straight to Paso, to the house of Don Luciano Perez, the police magistrate.

The hacendero was one of the richest landed proprietors in the country; and as he was thoroughly acquainted with the spirit of the depositories of justice in those parts, he had consequently been careful to line his purse well.

The worthy Don Luciano shuddered on hearing the details of what had occurred between Don Pablo and the squatters. He swore that he would, without delay, take an exemplary vengeance for this startling felony on the part of the heretic dogs. Confirming himself more and more in his resolution, he buckled on his sword, gave orders to twenty well-armed alguazils to mount, and placing himself at the head of this numerous escort, he proceeded toward Buffalo Valley.

Don Miguel had witnessed with secret annoyance all these formidable preparations. He placed but slight confidence in the courage of the police-men, and he would have preferred the judge leaving him master to act as he pleased. He had even adroitly attempted to obtain from Don Luciano a regular warrant, which he would have executed however he might think proper; but the judge, burning with an unusual warlike ardour, and spurred on by the large sum he had received, would listen to nothing, but insisted on himself taking the head of the expedition.

Don Luciano Perez was a plump little man of about sixty years of age, round as a tub, with a jolly red face, adorned with a rubicund nose and two cunning little eyes. This man cordially detested the North Americans.

The little band proceeded rapidly toward the forest. The judge hurled fire and flames at the audacious usurpers, as he called them: he spoke of nothing less than killing them without mercy, if they attempted even the slightest resistance to his orders. Don Miguel, who was much calmer, and foreboded no good from this great wrath, sought in vain to pacify him by telling him that he would in all probability have to do with men difficult to intimidate.

They gradually approached. The hacendero, in order to shorten the journey, had led the band by a cross road, which saved one-third the distance; and the first trees of the forest already appeared about two miles off. The mischief produced by the squatters was much more considerable than Don Pablo had represented; and, at the first glance, it seemed impossible that, in so short a time, four men, even though working vigorously, could have accomplished it. The finest trees lay on the ground, enormous piles of planks were arranged at regular distances, and on the San Pedro an already completed raft only awaited a few more stems of trees to be thrust into the water.

Don Miguel could not refrain from sighing at the sight of the devastation committed in one of his best forests; but the nearer they approached the spot where

they expected to meet the squatters the more lukewarm grew the warlike zeal of the judge and his acolytes, and the haciennero soon found himself compelled to urge them on, instead of restraining them as he had hitherto done. Suddenly the sound of an axe re-echoed a few paces ahead of the band. The judge, impelled by the feeling of his duty, and shame of appearing frightened, advanced boldly in the direction of the sound, followed by his escort.

"Stop!" a rough voice shouted at that moment.

With that instinct of self-preservation which never abandons them, the alguazils stopped as if their horses' feet had been suddenly welded to the ground. Ten paces from them stood a man in the centre of the ride, leaning on an American rifle. The judge turned to Don Miguel with such an expression of hesitation and honest terror that the haciennero could not refrain from laughing.

"Come, courage, Don Luciano!" he said to him. "This man is alone."

"*Con nil diablos!*" the judge exclaimed, ashamed of this impression which he could not master, and frowning portentously, "forward, you fellows, and fire on that scoundrel if he makes but a sign to resist you."

The alguazils set out again with prudential hesitation.

"Stop! I tell you again," the squatter repeated. "Did you not hear the order I gave you?"

The judge now said with a tone which he strove to render terrible, but which was only ridiculous through the terror he revealed,—

"I, Don Luciano Perez, *jefe de letras* of the town of Paso, have come, by virtue of the powers delegated to me by the Government, to summon you and your adherents to quit within twenty-four hours this forest."

"Ta, ta!" the stranger shouted, rudely interrupting the judge, and stamping his foot savagely. "I care as much for all your words and laws as I do for an old mocassin. The ground belongs to the first comers. We are comfortable here, and mean to remain."

"Your language is very bold, young man," Don Miguel then said. "You do not consider that you are alone, and that we have strength on our side."

The squatter burst into a laugh.

"You believe that," he said. "Learn, stranger, that I care as little for the ten fools I now have before me as I do for a woodcock, and that they will do well to leave me at peace, unless they want to learn the weight of my arm at their expense."

And he began carelessly whistling "Yankee Doodle." At the same instant three men, at the head of whom was Red Cedar, appeared. At the sight of these unexpected reinforcements the alguazils made a movement in retreat. The affair was becoming singularly complicated.

"Hulloh! what's up?" the old man asked roughly. "Anything wrong, Sutter?"

"These people," the young man answered, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously, "are talking about driving us from the forest by virtue of some order."

"Hulloh!" Red Cedar said. "The only law I recognize in the desert," he continued with a gesture of terrible energy, as he struck his rifle barrel, "is this. Withdraw, strangers, if you do not wish blood to be shed between us. I am a peaceful man, wishing to do no one a hurt; but I warn you that I will not allow myself to be kicked out without striking a blow."

"You will not be turned out," the judge remarked timidly; on the contrary, you have seized on what belongs to other people."

"I won't listen to arguments, which I do not understand," the squatter roughly exclaimed. "God gave the ground to man that he might labour on it. Every proprietor who does not fulfil this condition tacitly renounces his rights, and the

earth then becomes the property of the man who tills it with the sweat of his brow; so go to the devil! Be off at full speed, if you do not wish harm to happen to you!"

"We will not suffer ourselves to be intimidated by your threats," the judge said, "we will do our duty, whatever may happen."

"Try it," Red Cedar said with a grin.

And he made a sign to his sons. The latter arranged themselves in a single line.

"In the name of the law," the judge said with energy, as he pointed out the old man, "alguazils, seize that person."

But, as so frequently happens under similar circumstances, this order was more easy to give than to execute. Red Cedar and his sons did not appear at all disposed to let themselves be collared.

"For the last time, will you be off?" the squatter shouted. "Let them have it."

His three sons raised their rifles. At this movement, which proved to them that the squatters would not hesitate to proceed to extremities, the alguazils were seized with an invincible terror. They turned bridle and galloped off at full speed.

One man alone remained motionless before the squatters—Don Miguel Zarate. Red Cedar had not recognised him. Don Miguel dismounted, placed the pistols from his holsters through his belt, fastened his horse to a tree, and coolly throwing his rifle across his shoulders, boldly advanced toward the squatters. The latter, surprised by the courage of this man, who alone attempted what his comrades had given up all hopes of achieving, let him come up to them without offering the slightest opposition. When Don Miguel was a couple of paces from the old squatter, he stopped, put the butt of his rifle on the ground, and removing his hat, said,—

"Do you recognise me, Red Cedar?"

"Don Miguel Zarate!" the bandit shouted.

"As the judge deserts me," the hacendero continued, "and has fled like a coward, I am obliged to take justice for myself, and, by heavens, I will do so!" Red Cedar, I, as owner of this forest, order you to depart at once."

The young men exchanged a few muttered threats.

"Silence!" Red Cedar commanded. "Let the caballero speak."

"I have finished, and await your answer."

The squatter appeared to reflect deeply.

"The answer you demand is difficult to give," he at length said: "my position toward you is not a free one."

"I dispense you from all gratitude."

"That is possible. You are at liberty to do so; but I cannot forget the service you rendered me."

"It is of little consequence."

"Much more than you fancy, caballero. I may be, through my character, habits, and the mode of life I lead, beyond the law of civilised beings; but I am not the less a man."

"Prove it, then, by going away as quickly as you can, and then we shall be quits."

The squatter shook his head.

"Listen to me, Don Miguel," he said. "You have in this country the reputation of being the providence of the unfortunate. I know from myself the extent of your kindness and courage. It is said that you possess an immense fortune, of which you do not yourself know the extent."

"Well, what then?"

"The damage I can commit here, even if I cut down all the trees in the forest,

would be but a trifle to you: then whence comes the fury you display to drive me out?"

"Your question is just, and I will answer it. I demand your departure from my estates because, only a few days back, my son was grievously wounded by your lads, who led him into a cowardly snare; and if he escaped death, it was only through a miracle."

"Is this true?" said Red Cedar.

The young men only hung their heads in reply.

"I am waiting," Don Miguel went on.

"Come, the question cannot be settled thus, so we will proceed to my jacal."

"For what purpose? I ask you for a yes or a no."

"I cannot answer you yet. We must have a conversation together. Follow me, then, without fear."

"I fear nothing, as I believe I have proved to you. Go on, as you demand it: I will follow you."

Red Cedar made his sons a sign to remain where they were, and proceeded with long strides toward his jacal, which was but a short distance off. Don Miguel walked carelessly after him. They entered the cabin. It was deserted. The two females were doubtless also occupied in the forest. Red Cedar closed the door after him, sat down on a bench, and made his guest a sign to do the same.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ASSASSINATION.

"LISTEN to me, Don Miguel," Red Cedar said, "and pray do not mistake my meaning. I have not the slightest intention of intimidating you, nor do I think of attempting to gain your confidence by revelations which you may fairly assume I have accidentally acquired."

"I do not understand you," said the hacendero. "Explain yourself more clearly, for the words you have just uttered are an enigma."

"You shall be satisfied, caballero; and if you do not catch the meaning of my words this time it must be because you will not. Like all intelligent men, you are wearied of the struggles in which the vital strength of your country is exhausted. You have seen that a land so rich, so fertile, so gloriously endowed as Mexico, could not—I should say ought not—to remain longer the plaything of paltry ambitions. For nearly thirty years you have dreamed of emancipation, not of your entire country, for that would be too rude a task, and unrealisable; but you said to yourself, 'Let us render New Mexico independent; form it into a new State, governed by wise laws rigorously executed. By liberal institutions let us give an impetus to all the riches with which it is choked, give intellect all the liberty it requires, and perhaps within a few years the entire Mexican Confederation, amazed by the magnificent results I shall obtain, will follow my example. Are not those ideas yours, caballero? Do you consider that I have explained myself clearly this time?'"

"Perhaps so. The thoughts you attribute to me are such as naturally occur to all men who sincerely love their country, and I will not pretend that I have not entertained them."

"You would be wrong in doing so, for they are great and noble, and breathe the purest patriotism."

"A truce to compliments, and let us come to the point, for time presses."

"Patience. These ideas must occur to you sooner than to another as you are

the descendant of the first Aztec kings, and born defender of the Indians in this hapless country. You see that I am well acquainted with you, Don Miguel Zarate.

"Too well, perhaps," the Mexican gentlemen muttered.

The squatter smiled and went on:—

"It is not chance that led me to this country. I knew what I was doing, and why I came. Don Miguel, the hour is a solemn one. All your preparations are made; will you hesitate to give New Mexico the signal which must render it independent of the metropolis. Answer me."

Don Miguel started. He fixed on the squatter a burning glance, in which admiration at the man's language could be read.

"What! do you still doubt?" said Red Cedar.

He rose, went to a box from which he took some papers, and threw them on the table, saying,—

"Read."

Don Miguel hurriedly seized the papers, and ran his eye over them.

"Well?" he said, looking fixedly at the speaker.

"You see," the squatter answered, "that I am your accomplice. General Ibanez your agent in Mexico, is in correspondence with me, as is Mr. Wood, your agent at New York."

"It is true," the Mexican said coldly, "you have the secret of the conspiracy. The only point left is to what extent that goes."

"I possess it entirely, and you see, by these letters of General Ibanez and Mr. Wood, that I am commissioned by them to come to an understanding with you, and receive your final orders. Now what do you propose doing?"

"Nothing."

"What nothing!" the squatter exclaimed, bounding with surprise. "You are jesting, I suppose."

"Listen to me. I know not, nor care to know, by what means, more or less honourable, you have succeeded in gaining the confidence of my partners, and becoming master of our secrets. Still it is my firm conviction that a cause which employs such men as yourself is compromised, if not lost, thence I renounce every combination in which you are called to play a part. Your antecedents have placed you without the pale of the law."

"But does not the end justify the means?"

"That may be your morality, but it will never be mine. I repudiate all community of ideas with men of your stamp."

The squatter darted a look at him laden with hatred and disappointment.

"In serving us," Don Miguel continued, "you can only have an interested object, which I will not take the trouble of guessing at. An Anglo-American will never frankly aid a Mexican to conquer his liberty. I therefore renounce for ever the projects I had formed. I had, I grant, dreamed of restoring to my country the independence of which it was unjustly stripped; but it shall remain a dream."

"That is your last word?"

"The last."

"Good; then I now know what is left me to do."

"Well, what is it? Let me hear," the hacendero said as he crossed his arms on his breast.

"I hold your secret, and you are in my power."

"Perhaps."

"Remember that however rich you may be, Don Miguel Zarate, and perhaps because of those very riches, and in spite of the kindness you sow broadcast, the number of your enemies is very considerable."

"I know it."

"Very good. Those enemies will joyfully seize the first opportunity that presents itself to destroy you."

"It is probable."

"You see, then. When I go to the governor and tell him you are conspiring, and hand him not only these letters, but several others written and signed by you, lying in that chest, do you believe that the governor will treat me as an impostor?"

"Then you have letters in my handwriting?"

"I have three, which will be enough to have you shot; but, hang it all! you understand that, in an affair so important as this, it is wise to take one's precautions, for no one knows what may happen; and men of my stamp," he added with an ironical smile, "have more reasons than others for being prudent."

"Come, that is well played," the haciennero said, "and I compliment you on it; you are a better player than I gave you credit for."

"Oh! you do not know me yet."

"The little I do know suffices me."

"Then?"

"We will remain as we are, if you will permit me."

"You still refuse?"

"More than ever."

"Take care, Don Miguel," muttered the squatter hoarsely, "I will do what I told you."

"Yes, if I allow you the time."

"Eh?"

"*Caspita!* if you are a clever scamp, I am not altogether a fool. Do you believe, in your turn, that I will let myself be intimidated by your threats, and that I should not find means to keep you from acting?"

"I am curious to know the means you will employ to obtain this result."

"You shall see," Don Miguel replied with perfect coolness. "I shall kill you."

"Oh, oh!" the squatter said, as he looked complacently at his muscular limbs, "that is not easy."

"More so than you suppose, my master."

"Hum! and when do you reckon on killing me?"

"At once!"

The two men were seated in front of the hearth, each at the end of a bench: the table was between them, but a little back, so that while talking they only leaned an elbow on it. While uttering the last word, Don Miguel bounded like a tiger on the squatter, who did not at all expect the attack, seized him by the throat, and hurled him to the ground.

The Mexican's attack had been so sudden and well directed that the half-strangled squatter, in spite of his Herculean strength, could not free himself from his enemy's iron clutch, which pressed his throat like a vice. Red Cedar could neither utter a cry nor offer the slightest resistance: the Mexican's knee crushed his chest, while his fingers pressed into his throat.

So soon as he had reduced the wretch to utter impotence, Don Miguel drew from his vaquera boot a long sharp knife, and buried the entire blade in his body. The bandit writhed convulsively for a few seconds; a livid pallor suffused his face; his eyes closed, and he then remained motionless. Don Miguel left the weapon in the wound, and slowly rose.

"Ah! ah!" he muttered as he gazed at him, "I fancy that rogue will not denounce me now."

Without loss of time he seized the letters lying on the table, took from the box

the few documents he found in it, hid them all in his bosom, opened the door of the cabin, and went off with long strides.

The squatter's sons had not quitted their post.

"Well," Shaw asked him, "have you come to an understanding with the old man?"

"Yes, to our mutual satisfaction," and the Mexican mounted his horse and put him to a trot, but at the first turn in the road he dug his spurs into its flanks, and started at full speed.

"Now," Sutter observed, "I believe that we can proceed to the cabin without inconvenience."

And they gently walked towards the jacal.

Don Miguel, however, had not succeeded so fully as he imagined. Red Cedar was not dead. Attacked unawares, the squatter had not attempted a resistance, which he saw at the first glance was useless, and would only have exasperated his adversary. On feeling the knife-blade enter his body, he stiffened himself against the pain, and resolved on "playing 'possum." The success of his stratagem was complete. Don Miguel, persuaded that he had killed him, did not dream of repeating his thrust.

So long as his enemy remained in the jacal the squatter was careful not to make the slightest movement that might have betrayed him; but, so soon as he was alone, he opened his eyes, rose with an effort, drew the dagger from the wound, which emitted a jet of black blood, and looking at the door through which his assassin had departed with a glance so full of hatred that is impossible to describe, he muttered—

"Now we are quits, Don Miguel Zarate, since you have tried to take back the life of him you saved. Pray God never to bring us face to face again.

He uttered a deep sigh, and rolled heavily on the ground in a fainting fit. At this moment his sons entered the cabin.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SACHEM OF THE CORAS.

A FEW days after the events described in the previous chapter there was one of those lovely mornings which are not accorded to our cold climates. In a clump of flowering orange and lemon trees, whose sweet exhalations perfumed the air, and beneath a copse of cactus nopals, and aloes, a maiden was asleep, carelessly reclining in a hammock made of the thread of the *Phormium tenax*, which hung between two orange trees.

With her head thrown back, her long black hair unfastened, and falling in disorder on her neck and bosom; with her coral lips slightly parted, and displaying the dazzling pearl of her teeth, Dona Clara was really charming.

It was nearly mid-day; there was not a breath in the air. The heat was so stifling and insupportable, that every one in the hacienda had yielded to sleep, and was enjoying what is generally called in hot countries the *siesta*. Till, at a short distance from the spot where Dona Clara reposed, calm and smiling, a sound of footsteps, at first almost imperceptible, but gradually heightening, was heard, and a man made his appearance. It was Shaw, the youngest of the squatter's sons.

The young man was panting, and the perspiration poured down his cheeks. On reaching the entrance of the clump he bent an anxious glance on the hammock.

"She is there," he murmured. "She sleeps."

Then he fell on his knees upon the sand, and began admiring the maiden.

At length he uttered a sigh, and rose sadly, muttering in a whisper.—

"I must go—if she were to wake—oh, she will never know how much I love her!"

He plucked an orange flower, and softly laid it on the maiden! then he walked away a few steps, but almost immediately returning, he seized, with a nervous hand, Dona Clara's *rebozo*, which hung down from the hammock, and pressed it to his lips several times, saying, in a voice broken by the emotion he felt,—

"It has touched her hair."

And rushing from the thicket, he crossed the garden and disappeared. He had heard footsteps approaching. In fact, a few seconds after his departure, Don Miguel, in his turn, entered the copse.

"Come, come," he said gaily, as he shook the hammock, "sleeper, will you not have finished your siesta soon?"

"I am no longer asleep, father," said Dona Clara.

"Very good. That is the answer I like."

And he stepped forward to kiss her; but with a sudden movement, the maiden drew herself back as if she had seen some fearful vision.

"What is the matter with you?" the haciendero exclaimed with terror.

"The girl showed him the orange flower.

"Well," said her father, "what is there so terrific in that flower? It must have fallen from the tree.

Dona Clara shook her head sadly.

"No," she said: "for some days past I have always noticed, on waking, a similar flower,"

"You are absurd to frighten yourself thus about a trifle. Besides, why not take your siesta in your bedroom instead of burying yourself in this thicket?"

"I will follow your advice in future," the girl said.

"Come, that is settled, so say no more about it. Now give me a kiss."

The maiden threw herself into her father's arms. Both sat down on a grassy mound, and commenced one of those delicious chits-chats whose charm only those who are parents can properly appreciate. Presently a peon came up.

"What has brought you?" Don Miguel asked.

"Excellency," the peon answered, "a red-skin warrior has just arrived at the hacienda.

"Do you know him?" Don Miguel asked.

"Yes, Excellency; it is Eaglewing, the sachem of the Coras of the Rio San Pedro.

"Flying Eagle!" the haciendero cried, "What can have brought him to me? Lead him here."

The peon retired, and in a few minutes returned, preceding Flying Eagle.

The chief had donned the great war-dress of the sachems of his nation. His hair, plaited with the skin of a rattle-snake, was drawn up on the top of his head: in the centre an eagle plume was affixed. A blouse of striped calico, adorned with a profusion of bells, descended to his thighs, which were defended from the stings of mosquitos by drawers of the same stuff. He wore mocassins made of peccari skin, adorned with glass beads and porcupine quills. To his heels were fastened several wolves' tails, the distinguishing mark of renowned warriors. Round his loins was a belt of elk hide, through which passed his knife, his pipe, and his medicine bag. His neck was adorned by a collar of grizzly bear claws and buffalo teeth. Finally, a magnificent robe of white female buffalo hide, painted red inside, was fastened to his shoulders, and fell down behind him like a cloak. In his right hand he held a fan formed of a single eagle's wing, and in his left hand an American rifle. There was something imposing and singularly martial in the appearance and demeanour of this savage child of the forest.

On entering the thicket he bowed gracefully to Dona Clara, and then stood motionless before Don Miguel.

"My brother is welcome," the haciennero said. "To what do I owe the pleasure of seeing him?"

The chief cast a side glance at the maiden, who at once withdrew.

"My brother can speak," the haciennero then said; the ears of a friend are open."

"Yes, my father is good," the chief replied. Unhappily all the pale-faces do not resemble him."

"What does my brother mean? Has he cause to complain of any one?"

The Indian smiled sadly.

"Where is there justice for the red-skins?" he said. The great Spirit has not given them a soul, and it is not a crime to kill them."

"Come, chief, pray do not longer speak in riddles, but explain why you have quitted your tribe."

"Mookapee is alone: his tribe no longer exists."

"How?"

"The pale-faces came in the night, like jaguars without courage. They burned the village, and massacred all the inhabitants, even to the women and little children."

"Oh, that is frightful!" the haciennero murmured.

"Ah!" the chief continued with an accent full of terrible irony, "the scalps of the red-skins are sold dearly."

"And do you know the men who committed this atrocious crime?"

"Mookapee knows them, and will avenge himself."

"Tell me their chief, if you know his name."

"I know it. The pale-faces call him Red Cedar, the Indians the Man-eater."

"Oh! as for him, chief, you are avenged, for he is dead."

"My father is mistaken."

"How so? Why, I killed him myself."

The Indian shook his head.

"Red Cedar has a hard life," he said: "the blade of the knife my father used was too short. Red Cedar is wounded, but in a few days he will be about again, ready to kill and scalp the Indians."

"This news startled the haciennero; the enemy he fancied he had got rid of still lived, and he would have to begin a fresh struggle.

"My father must take care," the chief continued. "Red Cedar has sworn to be avenged."

"On! This man is a demon, of whom the earth must be purged at all hazards, before his strength has returned."

"I will aid my father in his vengeance."

"Thanks, chief. I do not refuse your offer. And now, what do you purpose doing?"

"Eaglewing will retire to the desert. He has friends among the Comanches. They will welcome him gladly."

"I will not strive to combat your determination, chief, for it is just; and if, at a later date, you take terrible reprisals on the white men, they will have no cause of complaint, for they have brought it on themselves. When does my brother start?"

"At sunset."

"Rest here to-day: to-morrow will be soon enough to set out."

"Mookapee must depart this day."

"Act as you think proper. Have you a horse?"

"No; but at the first manada I come to I will lasso one."

"I will give you a horse."

"Thanks; my father is good. The Indian chief will remember; but I have still a few words to say to my father."

"Speak, chief; I am listening to you."

"Koutonepi, the pale hunter, begged me to say that a great danger threatens my father. Koutonepi wishes to see him as soon as possible, in order himself to tell him its nature."

"Good! My brother will tell the hunter that I shall be to-morrow at the 'clearing of the shattered oak,' and await him there till night."

"I will faithfully repeat my father's words to the hunter."

The two men then quitted the garden, and hurriedly proceeded toward the hacienda.

After embracing his son and daughter, Don Miguel proceeded to the patio, where in the meanwhile, the chief had been amusing himself by making the magnificent horse he had chosen curvet. Don Miguel admired for several moments the Indian's skill and grace, for he managed a horse as well as the first Mexican *ginete*; then mounted, and the two men proceeded together toward the Paso del Norte, which they must cross in order to enter the desert, and reach the clearing of the shattered oak.

The journey passed in silence, for the two men were deeply reflecting. At the moment they entered Paso the sun was setting on the horizon in a bed of red mist, which foreboded a storm for the night. At the entrance of the village they separated; and on the morrow, as we have seen in our first chapter, Don Miguel set out at daybreak, and galloped to the clearing.

CHAPTER IX.

CONVERSATION.

VALENTINE GUILLOIS, whom we have already introduced to the reader in previous works, had traversed the vast solitudes of Mexico and Texas during the past five or six years. We saw him just now accompanied by the Araucano chief. They were the boldest hunters on the frontier. At times, when they had collected an ample harvest of furs, they went to sell them in the villages, renewed their stock of powder and ball, purchased a few indispensable articles, and then returned to the desert.

Now and then they engaged themselves for a week, or even a fortnight, with the proprietors of the haciendas, to free them from the wild beasts that desolated their herds; but so soon as the ferocious animals were destroyed, and the reward obtained, no matter the brilliancy of the offers made them by the land-owners, the two men threw their rifles on their shoulders and went off.

The deeds of every description performed by these hunters were incalculable, and their stories were the delight of the frontier dwellers during the winter night. The number of tigers they had killed was no longer counted.

Chance had one day made them acquainted with Don Miguel Zarate under strange circumstances, and since then an uninterrupted friendship had been maintained between them. Don Miguel, during a tempestuous night, had owed his life to the accuracy of Valentine's aim, who sent a bullet through the head of the Mexican's horse at a moment when, mad with terror, and no longer obeying the bridle, it was on the point of leaping into an abyss with its master. Don Miguel had sworn eternal gratitude to his saviour.

Valentine and Curumilla had made themselves the tutors of the hacendero's children, who, for their part, felt a deep friendship for the hunters. Don Pablo had frequently made long hunting parties in the desert with them; and it was to them

that he owed the certainty of his aim, his skill in handling weapons, and his knack in taming horses.

Frequently Don Miguel, impelled, not by curiosity, but merely by the interest he felt in them, had tried, by words cleverly thrown into the conversation, to give them an opening for confidence; but Valentine had always repelled these hints, though cleverly enough for Don Miguel not to feel offended by this want of confidence. With Curumilla they had been even more simple. Wrapped in his Indian stoicism, intrenched in his habitual sullenness, he was wont to answer all questions by a shake of the head, but nothing further.

The hunter and the Mexican were seated by the fire, while Curumilla, armed with his scalping-knife, was busily flaying the two jaguars.

"Eh, *compadre*!" Don Miguel said with a laugh; "I was beginning to lose patience, and fancy you had forgotten the meeting you had yourself given me."

"I never forget anything," Valentine answered seriously; "and if I did not arrive sooner, it was because the road is long from my jacal."

"Heaven forbid that I should reproach you, my friend! Still I confess to you that the prospect of passing the night alone in this forest only slightly pleased me, and I should have been off had you not arrived before sunset."

"You would have done wrong, Don Miguel: what I have to tell you is of the utmost importance to you. Who knows what the result might have been had I not been able to warn you?"

"You alarm me, my friend."

"I will explain. In the first place let me tell you that you committed, a few days back, a grave imprudence."

"I am waiting till you think proper to express yourself more clearly," Don Miguel said, with a slight tinge of impatience, "before I answer."

"You have quarrelled with a North American bandit."

"Red Cedar."

"Yes; and when you had him in your power you let him escape, instead of killing him out and out."

"That is true, and I was wrong. What would you? The villain has as tough a life as an alligator. But be at ease. If ever he fall into my hands again, I swear that I will not miss him."

"This man is one of those villains, the scum of the United States, too many of whom have lived on the frontier during the last few years. I do not know how he contrived to deceive your New York agent; but he gained his confidence so cleverly that the latter told him all his secrets."

"He told me so himself."

"Very good. It was then, I suppose, that you stabbed him?"

"Yes, and at the same time I seized the letters he held, and which might compromise me."

"A mistake. This man is too thorough-paced a scoundrel not to foresee all the chances of his treason. He had a last letter, the most important of all."

"I took three."

"Yes, but there were four. As the last, however, in itself was worth as much as the other three, he always wore it in a leathern bag hung round his neck by a steel chain: you did not dream of looking for that."

"But what importance can this letter, I do not even remember writing, possess?"

"It is merely the agreement drawn up between yourself, General Ibanez, and Mr. Wood."

"*Con mil demonios!*" the hacendero exclaimed in terror. "In that case I am lost."

"Nothing is lost so long as life exists."

"What is to be done?"

"Red Cedar has been about again for two days. His first care was to go to Santa Fé, the capital of New Mexico, and denounce you to the governor.

"Then I can only fly as speedily as I can?"

"Wait. Every man has in his heart at least one of the seven deadly sins as a bait for the demon. Fortunately for us, Red Cedar has them all seven, I believe, in the finest stage of development, avarice, before all. This man denounced you to the governor as a conspirator, &c., but was careful not to give up the proofs. When General Isturitz, the governor, asked him for his proofs, he answered that he was ready to supply them in exchange for the sum of one hundred thousand piastres in gold."

"Ah!" the hacendero said with a breath of relief, "and what did Isturitz say?"

"The general is one of your most inveterate enemies, and would give a good deal for the pleasure of having you shot; but still the sum appeared to him exorbitant, the more so as he would have to pay it all himself."

"Well, what did Red Cedar do then?"

"He did not allow himself beaten; on the contrary, he told the general he would give him a week to reflect."

"Hum! and on what day was this visit paid?"

"Yesterday morning; so that you have six days left."

"Six days—that is very little."

"Eh?" the Frenchman said with a shrug of his shoulders. "In my country

"Yes, but you are Frenchmen."

"That is true: hence I allow you twice the time we should require. Come, let us put joking aside. You are a man of more than common energy; you really wish the welfare of your country, so do not let yourself be crushed by the first reverse. Who knows but that it may all be for the best?"

"Ah, my friend, I am alone! General Ibanez, who alone could help me in this critical affair, is fifty leagues off. What can I do? Nothing."

"All. I foresaw your objection. Eaglewing, the Chief of the Coras, has gone from me to warn the general. You know with what speed Indians travel; so he will bring us the general in a few hours."

"You have done that, my friend?" said Don Miguel.

"By Jove!" Valentine said gaily, "I have done something else too. When the time arrives I will tell you what it is. What do you intend to do for the present?"

"I must first come to an understanding with the general."

"That is true; but it is the least thing," Valentine answered as he looked skyward, and attentively consulted the position of the stars. "It is now eight o'clock. Eagle-wing and the man he brings must be at midnight at the entrance of the *Canon del Buitre*. We have four hours before us, and that is more than we require."

"Let us go, let us go!" Don Miguel exclaimed eagerly.

"Wait a moment; there is no such hurry. Don't be alarmed; we shall arrive in time."

He then turned to Curumilla, and said to him in Araucano a few words which the hacendero did not understand. The Indian rose without replying, and disappeared in the density of the forest.

"You know," Valentine continued, "that I prefer, through habit, travelling on foot; still, as under present circumstances minutes are precious, and we must not lose them, I have provided two horses."

"You think of everything, my friend."

"Yes, when I have to act for those I love," Valentine answered with a retrospective sigh.

As he spoke the branches parted, and Curumilla re-entered the clearing, holding two horses by the bridle. These noble animals, which were nearly untamed *mustangs*, were literally covered with eagle plumes, beads, and ribbons, while long red and white spots completed their disguise, and rendered it almost impossible to recognise them.

"Mount!" Don Miguel exclaimed so soon as he saw them. "Time is slipping away."

"One word yet," Valentine remarked. "You still have as chaplain a certain monk of the name of Fray Ambrosio? Beware of that man—he betrays you."

"Good! I will remember."

"All right. Now we will be off," Valentine said, as he buried his spurs in his horse's flanks.

And the three horsemen rushed into the darkness with headlong speed.

CHAPTER X.

THE WINE SHOP.

TOWARDS nightfall of the next day, the inhabitants of the village of Paso del Norte, whom the intolerable heat of the tropical sun had kept prisoners in the interior of the houses, flocked out to inhale the sharp perfumes of the desert breeze, and bring back a little fresh air into their parched lungs. The town, which had for several hours appeared deserted, suddenly woke up: shouts and laughter were heard afresh. The walks were invaded by the mob, and in a few minutes the wine shops were thronged with idlers, who began drinking pulque and mezcal, while smoking their cigarettes, and strumming the jarabè and vihuela.

In a house of poor appearance, built, like all its neighbours, of earth bricks, and situated at the angle formed by the Plaza Mayor and the Calle de la Merced, some twenty-five fellows, whom it was easy to recognise as adventurers by the feather in their hats, their upturned moustaches, and specially by the long bronzed-hilted sword they wore on the thigh, were drinking torrents of aguardiente and pulque at the gambling tables, while yelling like deaf men, swearing like pagans, and threatening at every moment to unsheath their weapons.

In a corner of the room occupied by these troublesome guests, two men, seated opposite each other, at a table, seemed plunged in deep thought, and looked round them absently. These two men presented the most striking contrast. They were still young. The first, aged twenty-five at the most, had one of those frank, honest, and energetic faces which call for sympathy and attract respect. His palid brow, his face of a delicate hue, surrounded by his long black curls, his straight and flexible nose, his mouth filled with a double row of teeth of dazzling whiteness, and surmounted by a slight brown moustache, gave him a stamp of distinction, which was the more striking owing to the common style of his attire.

He wore the costume of the wood-rangers; that is to say, the Canadian *mitasse*, fastened round the hips, and descending to the ankle; *botas vaqueras* of deer skin, fastened at the knee; and a striped *zarepè* of brilliant colours. A Panama straw hat was thrown on the table, within reach of his hand, by the side of an American rifle and two double-barrelled pistols. A machete hung on his left side, and the hilt of a long knife peeped out of his left boot.

His companion was short and thick-set; but his well-knit limbs and his outstanding muscles indicated no ordinary strength. His face, the features of which were common-place enough, had a cunning look, which suddenly disappeared to

make room for a certain nobility whenever under the influence of any sudden emotion; his eyebrows contracted; and his glance, ordinarily veiled, flashed forth. He wore nearly the same garb as his comrade; but his hat, stained with rain, and the colours of his zarapè faded by the sun, evidenced lengthened wear. Like the first one we described, he was well armed.

Both were Canadians.

"Hum!" the first said. "After due consideration, Harry, I believe we shall do better by mounting our horses and starting, instead of remaining in this horrible den, amid these *gachupines*, who croak like frogs before a storm."

"Deuce take your impatience!" the other replied ill-temperedly. "Can't you remain a moment at rest?"

"Why, we have been here an hour."

"By Jove! Dick, you're a wonderful fellow," the other continued with a laugh. "Do you think that business can be settled all in a moment?"

"After all, what is our game? For five years we have hunted and slept side by side. We have come from Canada together to this place. I have got into a habit of referring to you everything that concerns our mutual interests. Still I should not be sorry to know, if only for the rarity of the fact, why on earth we left the prairies, where we were so well off, to come here, where we are so badly off."

"Have you ever repented, up to to-day, the confidence you placed in me?"

"I do not say so, Harry. Still I think——"

"You think wrong," the young man sharply interrupted. "Let me alone, and before three months you shall have three times your hat full of massive gold."

"Oh, oh!" he said in a low voice, "it is a placer."

"Hang it!" the other said, "were it not, should I be here? But silence, our man has come."

In fact, a man entered at this moment. On his appearance a sudden silence fell on the company; the adventurers, gambling and cursing at all the tables, rose, respectfully took off their plumed hats, and ranged themselves with downcast eyes to let him pass. The man remained for an instant on the threshold of the venta, took a keen glance at the company, and then walked toward the two hunters.

This man wore the gown of a monk; he had the ascetic face, with the harsh features and sharply-marked lines, that forms, as it were, the type of the Spanish monks.

"Continue your sports, my sons," he said to the company; "my presence need not disturb your frolics, for I only wish to speak for a few moments with these two gentlemen."

The adventurers did not let the invitation be repeated, but took their places again tumultuously, and soon the cries and oaths recommenced with equal intensity. The monk smiled, took a butacca, and seated himself between the two hunters, while bending a searching glance on them. So soon as he had done so, Harry poured him out a large glass of pulque, and placed within his reach maize leaf and tobacco.

"Drink and smoke, *senor padre*," he said to him.

The monk without any observation, rolled a cigarette, emptied the glass of pulque at a draught, and then said,—

"You are punctual."

"We have been waiting an hour," Dick observed.

"What is an hour in the presence of eternity!" the monk said with a smile.

"Let us not lose any more time," Harry continued. "What have you to propose to us?"

The monk lowered his voice.

"I can, if you like, make you rich in a few days"

"What is the business?" Dick asked.

"Of course," the monk continued, "this fortune I offer you is a matter of indifference to me. If I have an ardent desire to obtain it, it is, in the first place, because it belongs to nobody, and will permit me to relieve the wretchedness of thousands of beings."

"Of course, *senor padre*," Harry answered seriously. "According to what you told me a few days back, you have discovered a rich placer."

"Not I," the monk sharply objected.

"No consequence, provided that it exists," Dick answered.

"Pardon me, but it is of great consequence to me. I do not wish to take on myself the responsibility of such a discovery."

"Very good: you only desire to profit by it."

"Not for myself."

"For your parishioners. Very good; but let us try to come to an understanding, if possible."

"*Valga me Dois!*" the monk said, crossing himself, "how you have retained the impetuosity of your French origin! Have a little patience, and I will explain myself. But you will promise me——"

"Nothing," Dick interrupted. "We are honest hunters, and not accustomed to pledge ourselves so lightly before knowing positively what is asked of us."

Harry supported his friend's words by a nod.

"Your will be done," then said he. "You are terrible men; but the explanation is easy. Some time ago a wandering gambusino discovered the richest placer on this continent. It is situated in a wild district, and could only be worked by a large armed party. To organise this he came to Paso, and, getting into a drunken brawl, was killed. I was with him in his last moments, and to me he revealed the secret, giving me a rude map of the locality. Now you understand."

"Yes," said Harry, "but why, instead of first applying to your countrymen, do you propose the scheme to us?"

"Because Mexicans cannot be trusted, and before reaching the placer we should have to fight the Apaches and Comanches."

"All that is very fine," said Dick; "but it is absurd to suppose that two men can attempt such an enterprise in unknown regions peopled by ferocious tribes. It would require at least fifty."

"You are right, and hence I did not calculate on you alone. You will have determined men under your orders."

"Unluckily you are mistaken, *senor padre*," Harry said peremptorily. "We are honest hunters; but the trade of a gambusino does not at all suit us. Even if we had a chance of gaining an incalculable fortune, we would not consent to take part in an expedition of gold-seekers."

"Not even if Red Cedar consented to take the direction?" the monk said in a hoarse voice.

The hunter started, a feverish blush suffused his face, and it was in a voice choked by emotion that he exclaimed,—

"Have you spoken with him about it?"

"Here he is; you can ask him," the monk answered.

In fact Red Cedar was entering the place at this moment. He was more than six feet in height; his enormous head was fastened to his square shoulders by a short and muscular neck, like a bull's; his bony members were covered with muscles hard as ropes.

A fox-skin cap, pressed down on his head, allowed escape to a few tufts of coarse grayish hair, and fell on his little gray eyes, which were close to a nose that was hooked like the beak of a bird of prey; his wide mouth was filled with white, large

teeth; his cheek bones were prominent and purpled; and the lower part of his face disappeared in a thick black beard, mingled with gray hairs. He wore a hunting shirt of striped calico, fastened round the waist by a strap of brown leather, through which were passed two pistols, an axe, and a long knife; a pair of leggings of tawny leather, sewed at equal distances with hair, fell down to his knees; while his legs were protected by Indian mocassins, ornamented with a profusion of beads and bells. A game-bag of fawn-skin, which seemed full, fell over his right hip; and he held in his hand an American rifle, studded with copper nails.

The entry of Red Cedar was significant; the otherwise unscrupulous men who filled the *venta* hurriedly retired on his approach, and made room for him with zeal mingled with disgust. The old partisan crossed the room with head erect; a smile of haughty disdain played round his thin lips at the sight of the effect his presence produced, and he went up to the monk and his two companions. On reaching them he roughly placed the butt of his rifle on the ground, leaned his two crossed hands upon the barrel, and after bending a cunning glance on the persons before him, said to the monk in a hoarse voice,—

"The deuce take you, *senor padre*! Here I am; what do you want with me?"

"You are welcome, Red Cedar," replied the monk; "we were expecting you. Sit down, and we will talk while drinking a glass of pulque."

"The deuce twist your neck, an' may your accursed pulque choke you! Do you take me for a wretched abort on?" the other answered as he fell into the seat offered him. "Order me some brandy. I am not a babe, I suppose."

Without making the slightest observation, the monk rose, and presently returned with a bottle, from which he poured a bumper for the old hunter. The latter emptied the glass at a draught, put it back on the table with a sonorous "hum!" and turned to the monk with a grimacing smile.

"Come, the devil is not always so black as he is painted, *senor padre*," he said. "I see that we can come to an understanding."

"It will only depend on you, Red Cedar. Here are two worthy Canadian hunters who will do nothing without your support."

The Hercules took a side glance at the young men.

"Eh!" he said, "what do you want with these children? Did I not promise you to reach the *placer* with my sons only?"

"He, he! you are powerfully built, but I doubt whether four men were they twice as strong as you are, could carry out this affair successfully. You will have numerous enemies to combat."

"All the better! The more there are, the more we shall kill," he answered with a sinister laugh.

"*Senor padre*," Dick interrupted, "as far as I am concerned, I care little about it."

But he was suddenly checked by a meaning glance from his mate.

"What do you care little about, my pretty lad?" the giant asked in a mocking voice.

"Nothing," the young man answered drily. "Suppose I had not spoken."

"Good," Red Cedar remarked; "it shall be as you wish. Here's your health."

"Come," said Harry, "let us have but few words. Explain yourself once for all, without beating about the bush, *senor padre*."

"Yes," Red Cedar observed, "men ought not to waste their time thus in chattering."

"Very good. This, then, is what I propose. Red Cedar will collect within three days from this time thirty resolute men, of whom he will take the command, and we will start immediately in search of the *placer*."

"Hum!" Red Cedar said. "In order to go in search of the *placer*, we must know a little in what direction it is, or deuce take me if I undertake the business."

"Do not trouble yourself about that, Red Cedar; I will accompany you. Have I not a plan of the country?"

The colossus shot at the monk a glance which sparkled under his dark eyelash.

"That is true," he said with feigned indifference; "I forgot that you were coming with us. Then you will leave your parishioners during your absence?"

"Heaven will watch over them."

"Eh! it will have its work cut out. But why did you oblige me to come to this place?"

"In order to introduce you to these two hunters, who will accompany us."

"I beg your pardon," Dick observed, "but I do not exactly see of what use I can be to you in all this."

"On the contrary," the monk answered quickly, "I reckon entirely on you."

The giant had risen.

"What!" he said, "you do not understand that this honourable personage, who did not hesitate to kill a man in order to rob him of the secret of the placer, has a terrible fear of finding himself alone with me on the prairie? He fears that I shall kill him in my turn. Ha, ha, ha!"

And he turned his back unceremoniously.

"How can you suppose such things, Red Cedar?" the monk exclaimed.

"Do you fancy that I did not read your heart?" the latter answered. "But it is all the same to me. Do as you please: I leave you at liberty to act as you like."

"What! you are off already?"

"Hang it! what have I to do any longer here? All is settled between us. In three days thirty of the best frontier men will be assembled by my care at Grizzly Bear Creek, where we shall expect you."

After shrugging his shoulders once again, he went off without any salute, or even turning his head.

"It must be confessed," Dick observed, "that the man has a most villanous face."

"Oh!" the monk answered with a sigh, "the exterior is nothing. You should know the inner man."

"Why, in that case, do you have any dealings with him?"

"Because it must be so," the monk muttered.

"All right for you," Dick continued, "but as nothing obliges my friend and myself to have any more intimate relations with that man, you must not min'—"

"Hush, Dick!" said Harry. "You do not know what you are talking about. We will accompany you, senior padre. You can reckon on us to defend you if necessary, for I suppose that Red Cedar is right."

"In what way?"

"You do not wish to trust your life defencelessly in his hands, and you reckoned on us to protect you."

"Why should I feign any longer? Yes, that man terrifies me."

"Do not be alarmed; we shall be there, and on our word as hunters, not a hair of your head shall fall."

"Thanks," said the monk warmly.

Harry's conduct appeared so extraordinary to Dick, that, without striving to fathom the motives which made him act thus, he contented himself by backing up his words by an affirmative nod of the head.

"Be assured, caballeros, that when we have reached the placer, I will give you a large share."

"The money question has but slight interest with us," Harry answered. "My friend and I are free hunters, caring very little for riches, which would be to us rather a source of embarrassment than of pleasure and enjoyment. Curiosity alone, and the desire of exploring strange countries, are sufficient to make us undertake this journey."

"Thanks, gentlemen; I will not keep you longer. I know where to find you when I want you."

The young men took up their hats, slung their rifles on their shoulders, and left the wine shop. The monk looked after them.

"Oh!" he muttered, "I believe I can trust to those men: they have still in their veins a few drops of that honest French blood which despises treachery."

After this aside he rose and looked around him. After a moment's reflection the monk boldly struck the table with his clenched fist, and shouted in a loud voice—

"Senores caballeros, I invite you to listen to me. I have, I fancy, an advantageous proposal to make to you."

The company turned their heads; those who were gambling for a moment abandoned their cards and dice; the drinkers alone kept in their hands the glasses they held.

"Caballeros," he continued, "if I am not mistaken, all present are gentlemen whom fortune has more or less ill-treated."

The adventurers bowed their heads in affirmation.

"If you wish it," he continued, with an imperceptible smile, "I will undertake to repair the wrongs she has done you."

"Speak, speak, senor padre!" the adventurers shouted with delight. "What is the affair?"

"A war-party which I intend to lead shortly into Apacheria," the monk said.

At this proposition the first ardour of the adventurers visibly cooled down. The Apaches and Comanches inspire an invincible terror in the inhabitants of the Mexican frontiers. The monk guessed the effect he had produced; but he continued—

"I take you all into my service for a month, at the rate of four piastres a day."

At this offer the eyes of the adventurers sparkled with greed, fear gave way to avarice, and they exclaimed—

"We accept, reverend father!"

"But," one man continued, "we shall be happy, senor padre, if, before starting, you would give us your holy benediction, and absolve us from the few sins we may have committed."

"Well, be it so," he answered, after a few moment's reflection. "As the work in which I am about to employ you is so meritorious, I will give you my blessing, and grant you absolution of your sins."

For a few minutes there was a chorus of shouts and exclamations of joy in the room. The monk demanded silence, and when it was restored he said—

"Now, caballeros, give me each your name, that I may find you when I need you."

He sat down, and began enrolling the adventurers. We will leave the monk for a few moments, and follow the two Canadian hunters.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TWO HUNTERS.

HARRY and Dick, whom we saw seated at a table in the wine shop with Red Cedar and Fray Ambrosio, were, however, very far from resembling those two men morally. They were free and bold hunters, who had spent the greater part of their life in the desert, and who, in the vast solitudes of the prairie, had accustomed themselves to a life free and exempt from those vices which so often accompany a town residence.

They had scarce quitted the place ere Dick said, looking at his friend curiously—

“We have been hunting together for five years, Harry, and up to the present I have ever let myself be guided by you. Still this evening your conduct has appeared to me so extraordinary that I am obliged to ask you for an explanation of what has occurred.”

“For what good, my boy? Do you not know me well enough to be certain that I would not consent to any dishonourable deed?”

“Up to this evening I would have sworn it, Harry: yes, on my honour I would have sworn it——”

“And now?” the young man asked.

“Now,” Dick answered, with a certain degree of hesitation, “hang it all! I will be frank with you, Harry as an honest hunter should ever be. Now I do not know if I should do so.”

“What you say there causes me great pain, Dick. You oblige me, in order to dissipate your unjust suspicions, to confide to you a secret which is not my own.”

“Pardon me, Harry, but in my place I am convinced you would act as I am doing.”

“I will do what you ask, Dick, whatever it may cost me. I recognise the justice of your observations. I understand how much my conduct this night must have appeared ambiguous. I do not wish the slightest cloud to arise between us. You shall be satisfied.”

“I thank you Harry. I confess that I should have been in despair to think badly of you; but the words of that intriguing monk, and the manners of his worthy acolyte, Red Cedar, put me in a passion. Had you not warned me so quickly to silence, I believe that I should have ended by telling them a piece of my mind.”

“You displayed considerable prudence in keeping silence. You shall soon understand all, and I feel assured you will completely approve me.”

“I do not doubt it, Harry; and now I feel certain I deceived myself. I feel jolly again.”

While speaking thus the two hunters had crossed the village, and found themselves already far in the plain. The night was magnificent. The moon spread its silvery rays profusely over the landscape. The sharp odour of the flowers perfumed the atmosphere.

“Where are we going now, Harry?” Dick asked. “I fancy we should do better by taking a few hours’ rest, instead of fatiguing ourselves without any definite object.”

“I never do anything without a reason, friend, as you know,” Harry answered; “so let me guide you.”

“Do as you think proper, my boy.”

“In the first place you must know that the French hunter, Koutonepi, has begged me to watch Fra Ambrosio. That is one of the motives which made me be present at this night’s interview.”

"Koutonepi is the first hunter on the frontier. You acted rightly, Harry, in doing what he asked."

"As for the second reason that dictated my conduct, Dick, you shall soon know it."

The darkness was profound in the forest: the density of the leafy dome under which they walked completely intercepted the light of the moonbeams. Still the Canadians, long accustomed to a night march, advanced as easily through the chaos of creepers and trees tangled in each other as if they had been in open day. On reaching a spot where the trees, growing less closely together, formed a species of clearing, and allowed an uncertain and tremorous light to pass, Harry stopped, and made his comrade a sign to do the same.

"This is the place," he said. "Still, as the person I have come to see expects me to be alone, and your unexpected presence might cause alarm, hide yourself behind that larch tree."

"Oh, oh!" the hunter said with a laugh, "have you perchance led me to a love meeting, Harry?"

"You shall judge," Harry replied laconically.

Dick, greatly troubled, did not need the invitation to be repeated: he concealed himself behind the tree his friend had indicated, and which would have sheltered a dozen men behind its enormous stem. So soon as Harry was alone he raised his fingers to his lips, and at three different intervals imitated the cry of an owl with such perfection that Dick himself was deceived, and mechanically looked up to seek the bird in the tall branches of the tree by which he stood. Almost immediately a slight noise was audible in the shrubs, and a graceful and white form appeared in the glade. It was Ellen, who rapidly walked toward the young man.

"Oh, it is you, Harry!" she said with joy. "Heaven be blessed! but you are late."

"It is true, Ellen: pardon me. It is not my fault that I did not arrive sooner."

"How good you are, Harry, to take so much trouble for my sake!"

"Oh! do not speak of it! It is a happiness for me to do anything agreeable to you."

"Alas!" the maiden murmured, "Heaven is my witness that I feel a deep friendship for you, Harry."

"I have done what you asked of me," said the young man.

"Then it is true that my father is thinking about leaving this country to go further still?"

"Yes, Ellen, and into frightful countries, among the ferocious Indians."

"Do you know the reason of his going?" the girl continued.

"Yes; he is about to look for a gold placer."

"Alas!" who will protect me, who will defend me in future, if we go away?"

"I, Ellen!" the hunter exclaimed impetuously. "Have I not sworn to follow you everywhere?"

"It is true," she said sadly, "but why should you risk your life on the distant journey we are about to undertake? From what I have heard say, the band my father commands will be numerous—it will have scarce anything to fear from the Indians; while, on the other hand, you, compelled to hide yourself, will be exposed alone to terrible danger. No, Harry, I will not permit it."

"Undeceive yourself, Ellen. I shall not be forced to conceal myself; I shall not be alone, for I am a member of your father's band. I enrolled myself this very evening."

"Oh!" she said, "then in that case we can often meet?"

"Are your mother and father still unkind to you, Ellen?"

"It is nearly always the same thing; and yet their conduct toward me is strange."

It often seems to me incomprehensible, as it is so marked with peculiarities. There are moments in which they seem to love me dearly. My father especially caresses and embraces me, and then all at once, I know not why, repulses me rudely."

"That is indeed strange, Ellen."

"Is it not? There is one thing above all I cannot explain."

"Tell it me, Ellen: perhaps I can do so."

"I wear round my neck a small golden crucifix. Every time accident makes this trinket glisten before my father and mother they grow furious, threaten to beat me, and order me to hide it at once. Do you understand the meaning of this, Harry?"

"No, I do not, Ellen; but, believe me, leave everything to time: perhaps it will enable us to find the clue to the mystery which we seek in vain at this moment."

"Well, your presence has rendered me happy for a long time, Harry, so now I will retire."

"Already?"

"I must, my friend. Believe me that I am as sad as yourself at this separation; but my father has not yet returned, and may arrive at any moment. If he noticed that I was not asleep, who knows what might happen?"

While saying the last words the girl held out her delicate hand to the hunter, who raised it to his lips passionately. Ellen withdrew it suddenly, and bounding like a startled fawn, darted into the forest, where she soon disappeared, giving the young man a parting word, which caused him to quiver with joy.

"We shall meet soon."

Harry stood for a long time with his eyes fixed on the spot where the seductive vision had disappeared. At length he uttered a sigh, threw his rifle over his shoulder, and turned as if to depart. Dick was before him. Harry gave a start of surprise, for he had forgotten his friend's presence; but the latter smiled good-humouredly.

"I now comprehend your conduct, Harry," he said to him; "you were right to act as you did. Pardon my unjust suspicions, and count on me everywhere and always."

Harry silently pressed the hand his friend offered him, and they walked back rapidly in the direction of the village.

Without entering upon any retrospect of Fray Ambrosio's life, it will be sufficient to say there were dark secrets in it which would not bear the light, and that the one hinted at by Red Cedar was founded on fact.

It was whispered by more than one, that after discovering the secret of the placer, he had himself provoked the brawl in which the unfortunate gold-seeker perished.

Be this as it may, we must now follow in the footsteps of the monk.

CHAPTER XII.

TWO VARIETIES OF VILLAINS.

FRAY AMBRASIO ambled gently on, while reflecting on the events of the evening, and calculating mentally the probable profits of the expedition he meditated. He had left far behind him the last houses of the village, and was advancing cautiously along a narrow path when suddenly his mule pricked up its ears, raised its head, and stopped short.

Looking up he saw about ten paces from him a man was standing right in the

middle of the path. Fray Ambrosio was a man not easily to be frightened: besides, he was well armed. He drew out one of the pistols hidden under his gown, cocked it, and prepared to cross-question the person who so resolutely barred his way. But the latter, at the sharp sound of setting the hammer, thought it prudent to make himself known.

"Halloh!" he shouted, "put up your pistol, Fray Ambrosio; I only want to talk with you."

"*Diavolo!*" the monk said, "the hour and moment are singularly chosen for a friendly conversation."

"Time belongs to nobody," the stranger answered sententiously. "I am obliged to choose that which I have at my disposal."

"That is true," the monk said as he quietly uncocked his pistol, though not returning it to his belt. "Who the deuce are you, and why are you so anxious to speak with me? Do you want to confess?"

"Must I tell you my name that you may know with whom you have to deal?"

"Needless, my good sir, needless; but how the deuce is it, Red Cedar, that I meet you here? What can you have so pressing to communicate to me?"

"You shall know if you will stop for a few moments and dismount."

"The deuce take you with your whims! Cannot you tell me that as well to-morrow? Night is getting on, and my home is still some distance off."

"What I have to say to you does not admit of delay."

"You wish to make a proposal to me, then?"

"Yes, about the affair we discussed this evening at the Paso."

"Why, I fancied we had settled all that, and you accepted my offer."

"Not yet, not yet, my master. That will depend on the conversation we are about to have, so you had better dismount and sit down quietly by my side."

"The deuce take people who change their minds every minute, and on whom one cannot reckon more than on an old surplice!" growled the monk.

"Here I am," the monk went on, so soon as he was seated. "I really do not know, Red Cedar, why I yield so easily to all your whims."

"Because you suspect that your interest depends on it: were it not for that, you would not do so."

"Why talk thus in the open country, instead of going to your house, where we should be much more comfortable?"

Red Cedar shook his head in denial.

"No," he said; "here we need not fear listeners at our doors."

"That is true. Well, go on; I am listening."

"Hum! you insist upon my commanding the expedition you project?"

"Of course. I have known you a long time. I am aware that you are a sure man, perfectly versed in Indian signs."

"Do not speak about what I have done. The question now concerns you, and not me."

"How so?"

"Good, good! Let me speak. You need me, so it is to my interest to make you pay as dearly as I can."

"I am not rich, gossip, as you are aware."

"I know that, so soon as you have a few ounces, the *montè table* strips you of them immediately."

"Hang it! I have always been unlucky at play."

"For that reason I do not intend asking you for money."

"Very good. If you have no designs on my purse we can easily come to an understanding."

"I hope we shall, the more as the service I expect from you is almost nothing."

"Come to the point, Red Cedar."

"You know that I have a deadly hatred against Don Miguel Zarate?"

"I have heard say he lodged his knife in your chest?"

"Yes: but thanks to the devil, I am on my legs again, and I want my revenge."

"You are right: in your place I would do the same!"

"For that I count on your help."

"Hum! that is a delicate affair. I do not see how I can serve you."

"Don Miguel has a daughter, and I mean to carry her off."

"I cannot and will not help you in carrying off the daughter of Don Miguel, to whom I owe so many obligations."

"Measure your words, Fray Ambrosio, for this conversation is serious. Before refusing reflect."

"I have reflected, Red Cedar, and never will I consent to help you in carrying off the daughter of my benefactor. I am inflexible."

"Perhaps."

"Ta, ta, ta! you are mad, my good fellow. Don't let us waste our time. If you have nothing else to say to me I will leave you."

"You have become scrupulous all of a sudden, my master."

"There is a beginning to everything, compadre; so let us say no more but good-bye."

And the monk rose.

"By the way," said Red Cedar carelessly, "be kind enough to give me some information I require. It concerns a certain Don Pedro de Tudela."

"Eh?" the monk exclaimed.

"Come, come, Fray Ambrosio," Red Cedar continued in a jeering voice, "let us have a little more talk together. I will tell you, if you like, a very remarkable story about this Don Pedro."

The monk was livid; a nervous tremor agitated his limbs; he let loose his mule's bridle, and followed the squatter mechanically, who seated himself tranquilly on the ground, making him a sign to follow his example. The monk obeyed, suppressing a sigh, and wiping away the drops of cold perspiration that beaded on his forehead.

"Eh, eh!" the squatter continued at the end of a moment, "we must allow that Don Pedro was a charming gentleman—a little wild, perhaps; but what would you have? He was young. I remember meeting him at Albany a long time ago—some sixteen or seventeen years ago—at the house of one—wait awhile, the name has slipped my memory—could you not help me to it, Fray Ambrosio?"

"I do not know what you mean," the monk said in a hollow voice, while his right hand clutched the hilt of his dagger; and he bent on the squatter a glance full of deadly hatred.

"I have it!" continued his tormentor. "The man's name was Walter Brunnel."

"Demon!" howled the monk, "I know not who made you master of that horrible secret, but you shall die."

And he rushed upon him dagger in hand. But Red Cedar was on his guard. By a rapid movement he checked his arm, twisted it, and seized the dagger, which he threw a long distance off.

"Enough!" he said. "We understand one another, my master. Do not play that game with me."

The monk fell back on his seat, without the strength to make a sign or utter a syllable. The squatter regarded him for a moment with mingled pity and contempt, and shrugged his shoulders.

"For sixteen years I have held that secret," he said. "and it has never passed my lips. I will continue to keep silence on one condition, that you help me in carrying off the hacendero's daughter."

"I will do it."

"Mind, I expect honest assistance; so do not attempt any treachery."

"I will help you, I tell you."

"Good! I count on your word. Besides, you may be easy, master: I will watch you."

"Enough of threats. What is to be done?"

"When do we start for Apacheia?"

"We shall start in a week," the monk said.

"Good! On the day of the start you will hand over the girl to me, one hour before our departure."

"Be it so," the monk said with an effort. "I will do it; but remember, demon, if I ever hold you in my hands, as I am this day in yours, I shall be pitiless, and make you pay for all I suffer at this moment."

"You will be right to do so—it is your due: still I doubt whether you will ever be able to reach me. But a truce to quarrels," the squatter said, re-assuming the friendly tone which he employed at the outset of the conversation; I pledge myself to lead you straight to your placer. I have not lived ten years with the Indians not to be up to all their tricks."

"Of course," the monk answered as he rose, "you know, Red Cedar, what was agreed upon: the placer will be shared between us. It is, therefore, to your interest to enable us to reach it without obstacle."

"We shall reach it. Now that we have nothing more to say to each other, and have agreed on all points—or we have done so, I think?" he said significantly.

"Yes, all."

"We can part, and go each home. No matter, my master! I told you that I should succeed in making you alter your mind. Look you, Fray Ambrosio," he added in an impudent tone, which made the monk turn pale with rage; "people need only to understand one another to do anything." He rose, threw his rifle over his shoulder, and turning away sharply, went off with lengthened strides.

The monk remained for a moment as if stunned by what had happened, then as he got into the saddle, muttered "Oh! how did this demon discover the secret which I believed no one knew?"

And he went off gloomy and thoughtful. Half an hour later he reached the Hacienda de la Noria, when the gate was opened for him by a trusty peon, for everybody was asleep. It was past midnight.

We now return to the hacendero who, accompanied by his two friends, is galloping along in the direction of Valentine's jacal, near which, in a picturesque grotto, he was to meet his fellow conspirator, General Ibanez, under the guidance of Eaglewing, the chief of the Coras.

Punctual to a minute, the two men appeared.

The general was a man of about thirty-five, tall and well built, with a delicate and intelligent face. His manners were graceful and noble. He bowed cordially to the hacendero and Valentine, squeezed Curumilla's hand, and fell down in a sitting posture by the fire.

"Ouf!" he said. "I am done, gentlemen. I have just ridden an awful distance. My poor horse is foundered, and to recover myself I made an ascent, during which I thought twenty times I must break down; and that would have infallibly happened had not friend Eaglewing charitably come to my aid. I must confess that these Indians climb like real cats."

"At length you have arrived, my friend," Don Miguel answered. Heaven be praised!"

"For my part I confess that my impatience was equally great since I learned the treachery of that scoundrelly Red Cedar. That fool Wood sent him to me with so warm a recommendation that, in spite of all my prudence, I let myself be taken in, and nearly told him all my secrets."

"Do not feel alarmed, my friend. After what Valentine told me to-day, we have, perchance, a way of foiling the tricks of the infamous spy who has denounced us."

"May Heaven grant it! But nothing will remove my impression that Wood has something to do with what has happened."

"Who knows, my friend? Perhaps you are right. Unfortunately what is done cannot be helped, and our retrospective recriminations will do us no good."

"Come, come, gentlemen," Valentine said, the time is slipping away, and we have none to waste. If you permit me I will submit to your approval a plan which, I believe, combines all the desirable chances of success, and will turn in our favour the very treachery to which we have fallen victims."

"Speak, speak, my friend!" the two men exclaimed.

"Gentlemen," said Valentine, "this is what I propose. The treachery of Red Cedar, in surrendering to the government the secret of your conspiracy, places you in a critical position, from which you cannot escape, save by violent measures. You are between life and death. You have no alternative. The powder is fired, the ground is mined under your feet, and an explosion is imminent. Well, then, pick up the glove treachery throws to you—accept frankly the position offered. Do not wait till you are attacked, but commence the contest. All depends on the first blow. It must be terrible, and terrify them: if not, you are lost."

"All that is true, but we lack time," General Ibanez observed.

"Time is never lacking when a man knows how to employ it properly," Valentine answered peremptorily. "I repeat, you must be beforehand with your adversaries."

At this moment the sound of footsteps was heard in the cave. The most extreme silence at once reigned in the chamber where the five conspirators were assembled. Mechanically each sought his weapons. The steps rapidly approached, and a man appeared in the entrance of the hall. On seeing him all present uttered a cry of joy, and rose respectfully, repeating, "Father Seraphin!"

The man advanced smiling, bowed gracefully, and answered in a gentle and melodious voice, which went straight to the soul.

"Take your places again, gentlemen, I beg of you. I should be truly vexed if I caused you any disturbance. Permit me only to sit down for a few moments by your side."

They hastened to make room for him. Let us say in a few words who this person was whose unexpected arrival caused so much pleasure.

Father Seraphin was a Frenchman, and belonged to the order of the Lazarists. For five years he had been traversing as an indefatigable missionary, with no other weapon than his staff, the unexplored solitudes of Texas and New Mexico, preaching the Gospel to the Indians, while caring nothing for the terrible privations and nameless sufferings he incessantly endured, and the death constantly suspended over his head.

Father Seraphin was one of those numerous soldiers, ignored martyrs of the army of faith, who, making a shield of the Gospel, spread at the peril of their lives the word of God in those barbarous countries, and die heroically, falling bravely on their battle-field, worn out by the painful exigencies of their sublime mission; aged at thirty, but having gained over a few souls to the truth, and shed light among the ignorant masses.

Father Seraphin had gained the friendship and respect of all those with whom

accident had brought him into contact. Charmed with meeting a fellow-countryman in the midst of those vast solitudes, so distant from that France he never hoped to see again, he had attached himself closely to Valentine, to whom he vowed a deep and sincere affection.

So soon as Father Seraphin had taken his place near the fire, Eagle-wing and Curumilla hastened to offer him all those slight services which they fancied might be agreeable to him, and offered him a few lumps of roast venison with maize tortillas. The missionary gladly gratified the two chiefs, and accepted their offerings.

"It is a long time since we saw you, father," the hacendero said. "You neglect us. My daughter asked me about you only two days ago."

"Dona Clara is an angel who does not require me," the missionary replied gently. "I have spent nearly two months with the Comanche tribe of the Tortoise. Those poor Indians claim all my care."

"Are you satisfied with your journey?"

"Sufficiently so, for these men are not such as they are represented to us."

"Do you reckon on staying long among us?"

"Yes; this last journey has fatigued me extremely. My health is in a deplorable state, and I absolutely need a few days' rest."

"Well, father, come with me to the hacienda; you will remain with us, and make us all truly happy."

"I was going to make that request to you, Don Miguel. I am delighted that you have thus met my wishes."

"Father," Valentine then said, "is the game plentiful in the desert just at present?"

"Yes, there is a great deal: the buffaloes have come down from the mountains in herds—the elks, the deer, and the antelopes swarm."

Valentine rubbed his hands.

"It will be a good season," he said.

"Yes, for you. As for myself, I have no cause of complaint, for the Indians have been most attentive to me."

"All the better. I ever tremble when I know you are among those red devils."

"Why entertain such ideas, my friend?"

"They are correct. You cannot imagine what treacherous and cruel cowards those Apache thieves are. I know them, and carry their marks; but do not frighten yourself. If ever they ventured on any extremities against you, I know the road to their villages: there is not a nook in the desert which I have not thoroughly explored. It is not for nothing I have received the name of the "Trail-hunter. I swear to you I will not leave them a scap."

"Valentine, you know I do not like to hear you speak so. The Indians are poor ignorant men who know not what they do."

"All right, all right," the hunter growled. "You have your ideas on that score, and I mine."

"Yes," the missionary replied with a smile, "but I believe mine the better."

"And what are the Indians doing at this moment?" Valentine continued. "Are they still fighting?"

"No; I succeeded in bringing Unicorn, the principal chief of the Comanches, and Stanapat (the Handful of Blood), the Apache sachem, to an interview, at which peace was sworn."

"Hum," said Valentine; "that peace will not last long, for Unicorn has too many reasons to owe the Apaches a grudge."

"Nothing leads to the supposition at present that your forebodings will be speedily realised."

"Why so?"

"Because, when I left Unicorn, he was preparing for a grand buffalo hunt in which five hundred picked warriors were to take part."

"Ah, ah! and where do you think the hunt will take place, father?"

"I know for a certainty, because, when I left Unicorn, he begged me to invite you to it."

"I will willingly accept, for a buffalo hunt always had great attractions for me."

"And now, gentlemen, I will ask you to excuse me; for I feel so broken with fatigue, that, with your permission, I will go and take a few hours' rest."

"I was a fool not to think of it before," Valentine exclaimed.

"I thought for my brother," said Curumilla. "If my father will follow me all is ready."

The missionary thanked him with a smile and rose, and, supported by Eaglewing, followed Curumilla into another chamber of the grotto, where he found a bed of dry leaves covered with bear skins, and a fire so arranged as to burn all night. The two Indians retired after bowing respectfully to the father.

After his departure Valentine bent over to his two friends.

"All is saved," he said in a low voice.

"How? Explain yourself," they eagerly answered.

"Listen to me. You will spend the night here: at daybreak you will start for the Hacienda de la Noria, accompanied by Father Seraphin."

"Good: What next?"

General Ibanez will proceed, as from you, to the governor, and invite him to a grand hunt of wild horses, to take place in three days."

"I do not understand what you are driving at."

"That is not necessary at this moment.

Let me guide you; but, above all, arrange it so that all the authorities of the town accept your invitation and are present at the hunt."

"That I take on myself."

"Very good. You, General, will collect all the men you can, so that they can support you on a given signal, but hide themselves so that no one can suspect their presence."

"Very good," Don Miguel answered: "all shall be done as you recommend. But where will you be all this while?"

"You know very well," he answered with a smile of undefinable meaning. "I shall be hunting the buffalo with my friend Unicorn, the great chief of the Comanches."

CHAPTER XIII.

UNICORN.

BEFORE retiring to rest Father Seraphin, on the previous evening, had whispered a couple of words in the Indians' ears. The sun had scarce begun to rise a little above the extreme blue line of the horizon ere the missionary opened his eyes, and after a short prayer hurried to the hall in which his companions had remained. The four men were still asleep, wrapped in their furs and buffalo skins.

"Wake up, brothers," Father Seraphin said, "for day is appearing."

The four men started up in an instant.

"My brothers," the young missionary said, I thought that we ought, before separating, to thank God in common for the blessings He does not cease to vouchsafe to us—to celebrate our happy meeting of last night. I have, there-

fore, resolved to hold a mass, at which I shall be happy to see you with that purity of heart which such a duty demands."

At this proposition the four men exclaimed gladly their assent.

"I will help you to prepare the altar, father," Valentine said; "the idea is excellent."

"The altar is all ready, my friends. Have the kindness to follow me."

Father Seraphin then led them out of the grotto.

In the centre of a small esplanade in front of the cave an altar had been built by Eagle-wing and Curumilla on a grassy mound. It was very simple. A copper crucifix planted in the centre of the mound, covered by a cloth of dazzling whiteness; on either side of it two black-tin candlesticks, in which burned candles of yellow tallow, a Bible on the right, the pyx in the centre—that was all.

The mass lasted about three quarters of an hour. When it was finished the missionary placed the poor holy vessels in the bag he constantly carried with him, and they returned to the grotto for breakfast. An hour later, Don Miguel, General Ibanez, and the missionary took leave of Valentine, and mounted on their horses, which Curumilla had led to the entrance of the ravine. They started at a gallop in the direction of the Paso del Norte, whence they were about twenty leagues distant. Valentine and the two Indian chiefs remained behind.

"I am about to leave my brother," Eagle-wing said.

"Why not remain with us, chief?"

"My pale brother no longer requires Eagle-wing. The chief hears the cries of the men and women of his tribe who were cowardly assassinated, and demand vengeance."

"Where goes my brother?" the hunter asked, who was too thoroughly acquainted with the character of the Indians to try and change the warrior's determination.

"The Coras dwell in villages on the banks of the Colorado. Eagle-wing is returning to his friends. He will ask for warriors to avenge his brothers."

"May the Great Spirit protect my father!" said Valentine. "The road is long to the villages of his tribe. The chief is leaving friends who love him."

"Eagle-wing knows it: he will remember," the chief said with a deep intonation; and pressing the hands the two hunters held out to him, bounded on his horse and disappeared in the windings of the Canon. Valentine watched his departure with a sad and melancholy look.

"Shall I ever see him again?" he murmured. "He is an Indian, and is following vengeance. It is his nature. Every man must obey his destiny."

After this aside the hunter threw his rifle on his shoulder and started in his turn, followed by Curumilla. Valentine and his comrade were on foot, and after the Indian custom, walked one behind the other, not uttering a syllable; but toward mid-day the heat became so insupportable that they were obliged to stop to take a short repose. As the evening breeze rose, the hunters resumed their journey. They soon reached the banks of Rio Puerco (Dirty River), which they began ascending, following the tracks made since time immemorial by wild animals coming down to drink.

At the hour when the *maukawis* uttered its last song to salute the setting of the sun, the travellers perceived the tents of the Comanches. The Indians had, in a few hours, improvised a real village with their buffalo-skin tents, aligned to form streets and squares.

On arriving at about five hundred yards from the village the hunters suddenly perceived an Indian horseman. Evincing not the slightest surprise, they stopped

and unfolded their buffalo robes, which floated in the breeze, as a signal of peace. The horseman uttered a loud cry. At this signal—for it was evidently one—a troop of Comanche warriors debouched at a gallop from the village, and deploying to the right and left, they formed a vast circle, inclosing the two unmoved hunters.

Then a horseman quitted the group, dismounted, and rapidly approached the new comers: the latter hastened to meet him. All three had their arm extended with the palm forward in sign of peace. The Indian who thus advanced to meet the hunters was Unicorn, the great chief of the Comanches. As a distinctive sign of his race, his skin was of a red tinge, brighter than the palest new copper. He was a man of thirty at the most, with masculine and expressive features, and his muscular limbs evidenced a vigour and suppleness against which few men would have contended with advantage.

He was completely painted and armed for war; his black hair was drawn up on his head in the form of a casque, and fell down his back like a mane; a profusion of wampum collars, claws of grizzly bear, and buffalo teeth adorned his breast, on which was painted with rare dexterity a blue tortoise, the distinctive sign of the tribe to which he belonged, and of the size of a hand.

When the three men were close together they saluted by raising their hands to their foreheads; then Valentine and Unicorn crossed their arms by passing the right hand over the left shoulder, and bowing their heads at the same time, kissed each other's mouth after the prairie fashion. Unicorn then saluted Curumilla in the same way; and this preliminary ceremony terminated, the Comanche chief took the word.

"My brothers will follow me, and rest at the council fire."

The hunters bowed an assent. Each received a horse, and at a signal from Unicorn, who had placed himself between them, the troop started at a gallop, and returned to the village, which it entered to the deafening sound of drums, *chikikoues*, shouts of joy from the women and children who saluted their return, and the furious barking of the dogs. When the chiefs were seated round the council fire the pipe was lit, and ceremoniously presented to the two strangers, who smoked in silence for some minutes. When the pipe had gone the round several times Unicorn addressed Valentine.

"Koutonepi is a great hunter," he said to him: "he has often followed the buffalo. The chief will tell him the preparations."

"It is needless," chief Valentine replied. "The buffalo is the friend of the red-skins; the Comanches know all its stratagems. I should like to ask a question of my brother."

The hunter can speak: my ears are open."

"How long will the chief remain on the hunting grounds with his young men?"

"About a week. The buffaloes are suspicious; my young men are surrounding them, but they cannot drive them in our direction before four or five days."

"How many warriors have remained with the chief?"

"About four hundred: the rest are scattered over the plain to announce the approach of the buffaloes."

"Good! If my brother likes I will procure him a fine hunt within three days."

"Ah!" the chief exclaimed, "then my brother has started some game?"

"Oh!" Valentine answered with a laugh, "let my brother trust to me, and I promise him rich spoils."

"Good! Of what game does my brother speak?"

"Of *gachupinos*. In two days they will meet in large numbers not far from here."

"Wah!" said the Comanche, whose eyes sparkled at this news, "my young men will hunt them. My brother must explain."

Valentine shook his head.

"My words are for the ears of a chief," he said.

Without replying Unicorn made a signal: the Indians rose silently, and left the tent. Curumilla and Unicorn alone remained near the fire. Valentine then explained to the Comanche, in its fullest details, the plan he had conceived, in the execution of which the aid of the Indians was indispensable for him. Unicorn listened attentively without interrupting. When Valentine had ended,—

"What does my brother think?" the latter asked, fixing a keen glance on the countenance of the chief.

"Wah!" the other replied, "the pale-face is very crafty. Unicorn will do what he desires."

This assurance filled Valentine's heart with joy.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HUNT OF THE WILD HORSES.

DON MIGUEL ZARATE and his two friends did not reach the hacienda till late. They were received by Don Pablo and Dona Clara, who manifested great joy at the sight of the French missionary, for whom they felt a sincere esteem and great friendship. Spite of all his care, Fray Ambrosio had always seen his advances repelled by the young people, in whom he instinctively inspired that fear mingled with disgust that is experienced at the sight of a reptile.

Fray Ambrosio was too adroit to appear to notice the effect his presence produced on the hacendero's children: he feigned to attribute to timidity and indifference on religious matters what was in reality a strongly-expressed loathing for himself personally. But in his heart a dull hatred fermented against the two young folk, and especially against the missionary, whom he had several times already attempted to destroy by well-laid snares. Father Seraphin had always escaped them by a providential chance.

Don Miguel left his children with the missionary, who immediately took possession of him and dragged him away, lavishing on him every possible attention. The hacendero retired to his study with General Ibanez, when the two men drew up a list of the persons they intended to invite; that is to say, the persons Valentine proposed to get out of the way, though they were innocent of his scheme. The General then mounted his horse, and rode off to deliver the invitations personally. For his part, Don Miguel sent off a dozen peons and vaqueros in search of the wild horses, and to drive them gradually toward the spot chosen for the hunt.

General Ibanez succeeded perfectly: the invitations were gladly accepted, and the next evening the guests began arriving at the hacienda, Don Miguel receiving them with marks of the most profound respect and lavish hospitality.

The governor, General Isturitz, Don Luciano Perez, and seven or eight persons of inferior rank were soon assembled at the hacienda. At sunrise a numerous party, composed of forty persons, left the hacienda, and proceeded, accompanied by a crowd of well-mounted peons, towards the meet. This was

a vast plain on the banks of the Rio del Norte, where the wild horses were accustomed to graze at this season. Starting at about four A.M. from the hacienda, they reached four hours later a clump of trees, beneath whose shade tents had been raised and tables laid by Don Miguel's orders, so that they might breakfast before the hunt.

The riders, who had been journeying for four hours, already exposed to the rays of the sun and the dust, uttered a shout of joy at the sight of the tents. Each dismounted: the ladies were invited to do the same, among them being the wives of the governor and General Isturitz, and Dona Clara, and they gaily sat down round the tables.

Toward the end of the breakfast Don Pablo arrived, who had started the evening previously to join the vaqueros. He announced that the horses had been started, that a large manada was now crossing the Plain of the Coyotes, watched by the vaqueros, and that they must make haste if they wished to have good sport. This news augmented the ardour of the hunters. The ladies were left in camp under the guard of a dozen well-armed peons, and the whole party rushed at a gallop in the direction indicated by Don Pablo.

The leader of the vaqueros made his report. A manada of about ten thousand head were two leagues off on the plain, quietly grazing in the company of a few elks and buffaloes. The hunters scaled a hill, from the top of which they easily saw on the horizon a countless mob of animals, grouped in the most picturesque way, and apparently not at all suspecting the danger that threatened them.

After the vaquero's report Don Miguel and his friends held a council, and this is the resolution they came to. They formed what is called in Mexico the grand circle of the wild horses; that is to say, the most skilful riders were écheloned in every direction at a certain distance from each other, so as to form an immense circle. The wild horses are extremely suspicious: their instinct is so great, their scent is so subtle, that the slightest breath of wind is sufficient to carry to them the smell of their enemies, and make them set off at headlong speed. Hence it is necessary to act with the greatest prudence, and use many precautions, if a surprise is desired.

When all the preparations were made the hunters dismounted, and dragging their horses after them, glided through the tall grass so as to contract the circle. This manœuvre had gone on for some time, and they had sensibly drawn nearer, when the manada began to display some signs of restlessness. The horses which had hitherto grazed calmly, raised their heads, pricked their ears, and neighed as they inhaled the air. Suddenly they collected, formed a compact band, and started at a trot in the direction of some cotton-wood trees which stood on the banks of the river. The hunt was about to commence.

At a signal from Don Miguel six well-mounted vaqueros rushed at full speed ahead of the manada, making their lassos whistle round their heads. The horses startled by the apparition of the riders, turned back hastily, uttering snorts of terror, and fled in another direction. But each time they tried to force the circle, horsemen rode into the midst of them and compelled them to turn back.

When this manœuvre had lasted long enough, and the horses began to grow blinded with terror, at a signal given by Don Miguel the circle was broken at a certain spot. The horses rushed, with a sound like thunder, toward this issue which opened before them, overturning with their chests everything that barred their progress. But it was this the hunters expected. The horses in their mad race, galloped on without dreaming that the road they followed grew narrower in front of them and terminated in inevitable captivity.

Let us explain the termination of this hunt. The manada had been cleverly guided by the hunters toward the entrance of a *cañon*, or ravine, which ran between two rather lofty hills. At the end of this ravine the vaqueros had formed, with stakes fifteen feet long, planted in the ground, and firmly fastened together with cords of twisted bark, an immense corral or enclosure, into which the horses rushed without seeing it. In less than no time the corral was full: then the hunters went to meet the manada, which they cut off at the risk of their lives, while the others closed the entrance of the corral. More than fifteen hundred magnificent wild horses were thus captured at one stroke.

The noble animals rushed with snorts of fury at the walls of the inclosure, trying to tear up the stakes with their teeth, and dashing madly against them. At length they recognised the futility of their efforts, lay down and remained motionless. In the meanwhile a tremendous struggle was going on in the ravine: between the hunters and the rest of the manada. The horses confined in this narrow space made extraordinary efforts to open a passage and fly anew. They neighed, stamped, and flew at everything that came within their reach. At length they succeeded in regaining their first direction, and rushed into the plain with the velocity of an avalanche. Several vaqueros had been dismounted and trampled on by the horses, and two of them had received such injuries that they were carried off the ground in a state of insensibility.

With all the impetuosity of youth, Don Pablo had rushed into the very heart of the manada. Suddenly his horse received a kick which broke its off fore leg, and it fell to the ground, dragging its rider with it. But he rose with the rapidity of lightning, and quick as thought seizing the mane of the nearest horse, he leaped on its back, and held on by his knees. Then a strange thing occurred—an extraordinary struggle between the horse and its rider. The noble beast, furious at feeling its back dishonoured by the weight it bore, bounded, reared, rushed forward; but all was useless, for Don Pablo adhered firmly.

So long as it was in the ravine, the horse, impeded by its comrades, could not do all it might have wished to get rid of the burden it bore; but so soon as it found itself on the plain it threw up its head, made several leaps on one side, and then started forward at a speed which took away the young man's breath.

Don Pablo held on firmly by digging his knees into the panting sides of his steed: he unfastened his cravat, and prepared to play the last scene in this drama, which threatened to terminate in a tragic way for him. The horse had changed its tactics: it was racing in a straight line to the river, resolved to drown itself with its rider sooner than submit, when suddenly the horse changed its plans again, reared, and tried to fall back with its rider. Don Pablo clung convulsively to the animal's neck, and at the moment it was falling back, he threw his cravat over its eyes with extraordinary skill.

The horse, suddenly blinded, fell back again on its feet, and stood trembling with terror. Then the young man dismounted, put his face to the horse's head, and breathed into its nostrils, while gently scratching its forehead. This operation lasted ten minutes at the most, the horse panting and snorting, but not daring to leave the spot. The Mexican again leaped on the horse's back, and removed the bandage: it remained stunned—Don Pablo had tamed it. Everybody rushed toward the young man, who smiled proudly, in order to compliment him on his splendid victory. Don Pablo dismounted, gave his horse to a vaquero, who immediately passed a bridle round its neck, and then walked toward his father, who embraced him tenderly. For more than an hour Don Miguel had despaired of his son's life.

"So soon as the emotion caused by Don Pablo's prowess was calmed they began thinking about returning. The whole day had been spent with the exciting incidents of the chase. The Hacienda de la Noria was nearly ten leagues distant; it was, therefore, urgent to start as speedily as possible, unless the party wished to run the risk of bivouacking in the open air.

The men would easily have put up with this slight annoyance, but they had ladies with them. Left one or two leagues in the rear, they must feel alarmed by the absence of the hunters, which had been protracted far beyond all expectation.

Don Miguel gave the vaqueros orders to brand the captured horses with his cipher; and the whole party then returned, laughing and singing, in the direction of the tents, where the ladies had been left. The vaqueros, who had served as beaters during the day, remained behind to guard the horses.

In these countries, where there is scarce any twilight, night succeeds the day almost without transition. As soon as the sun had set, the hunters found themselves in complete darkness. At a signal from Don Miguel the party set out at a long canter; for each felt anxious to reach the camp.

They arrived within a hundred yards of the fires, whose ruddy glow was reflected on the distant trees, when suddenly a fearful yell crossed the air, and from behind every bush out started an Indian horseman brandishing his weapons, and making his horse curvet round the white men, while uttering his war cry. The Mexicans, taken unawares, were surrounded ere they had sufficiently recovered from their stupor to think about employing their weapons. At a glance Don Miguel judged the position: it was a critical one. The hunters were at most but twenty; the number of Comanche warriors surrounding them was at least three hundred.

The Comanches and Apaches are the most implacable foes of the white race, they mercilessly kill all who fall into their hands. Certain of the fate that awaited them, the Mexicans rallied resolved to sell their lives dearly. There was a moment of supreme expectation before the commencement of the deadly combat, when suddenly an Indian galloped out of the ranks of the warriors, and rode within three paces of the little band of Mexicans. On arriving there he stopped, and waved his buffalo robe in sign of peace.

"Let me carry on the negotiations," Don Miguel said. "I know the Indians better than you do."

"Do so," the governor answered.

General Ibanez was the only one who had remained calm and impassive since the surprise. He did not make a move to seize his weapons; on the contrary, he crossed his arms carelessly on his chest, and took a mocking glance at his comrades, as he hummed a *seguedilla* between his teeth. The Indian chief took the word.

"Let the pale faces listen," he said; "an Indian sachem is about to speak."

"We have no time to spare in listening to the insidious words which you are preparing to say to us," Don Miguel replied in a haughty voice. "Withdraw, or there will be blood spilt."

"The pale-faces will have brought it on themselves," the Comanche answered in a gentle voice. "The Indians mean no harm to the pale warriors."

"Why then this sudden attack? The chief is mad; we know very well that he wants our scalps."

"No; Unicorn wishes to make a bargain with the pale-faces."

"Come, chief, explain yourself: perhaps your intentions are as you describe them."

"Good," said the Indian. "The great white chief is becoming reasonable. Let him listen then to the words of Unicorn."

"Go on chief; we are listening."

"The pale-faces are thieving dogs," the chief said in a rough voice; "they carry on a continual war with the red-skins, and buy their scalps as if they were peltry;

but the Comanches are magnanimous warriors, who disclaim to avenge themselves. The squaws of the white men are in their power; they will restore them."

At these words a shudder of terror ran along the ranks of the hunters; their courage failed them; they had only one desire left—that of saving those who had so wretchedly fallen into the hands of these blood-thirsty men.

"On what conditions will the Comanches restore their prisoners?" Don Miguel asked, whose heart was contracted at the thought of his daughter.

"The pale-faces," the chief continued, "will dismount. Unicorn will choose from among his enemies those whom he thinks proper to carry off; the rest will be free and all the women restored."

"Those conditions are harsh, chief; can you not modify them?"

"A chief has only one word. Do the pale-faces consent?"

"Let us consult together for a few moments at any rate."

"Good! Let the white men consult. Unicorn grants them ten minutes," the chief made answer.

And turning his horse he went back to his men. Don Miguel then addressed his friends.

"Well, what do you think of what has occurred?"

The Mexicans were terrified: still they were compelled to allow that the conduct of the Indians was extraordinary; and yet to struggle against enemies so numerous was insensate, and could only result in that the chief's conditions, harsh as they were, offered at least some chance of safety for a portion of them, and the ladies would be saved. This last and all-powerful consideration decided them.

Unicorn, with that cool courage characteristic of the Indians, then advanced alone toward the Mexicans, who still had their weapons, and who, impelled by their despair and at the risk of being all massacred, would have sacrificed him to their vengeance. The chief had also dismounted. With his hands crossed on his back, and frowning brow, he now commenced his inspection. The Unicorn, however, was generous: he only selected eight of the Mexicans, and the rest received permission to mount their horses, and leave the fatal circle that begirt them. Still, by a strange accident, or a premeditation of which the reason escaped them, these eight prisoners—among whom was the governor, General Isturitz, and the criminal judge, Don Luciano Perez—were the most important personages in the party, and the members of the Provincial Government.

It was not without surprise that Don Miguel observed this. The Comanches, however, faithfully fulfilled their compact, and the ladies were at once set at liberty. The Indians, who had surprised their camp, and seized them in the same way as they had done the hunters: that is to say, the camp was invaded simultaneously on all sides.

After the moments given up to the happiness of seeing his daughter again safe and sound, Don Miguel resolved to make a last attempt with Unicorn in favour of the unhappy men who remained in his hands. The chief listened with deference, and let him speak without interruption; then he replied with a smile whose expression the haciennero tried in vain to explain.

"Unicorn consents to accept a ransom for them, instead of making them slaves. My father can himself tell them this good news."

"Thanks, chief," Don Miguel answered. "The nobility of your character touches my heart: I shall not forget it. Be persuaded that, under all circumstances, I shall be happy to prove to you how grateful I am."

The chief bowed gracefully and withdrew. Don Miguel repeated to his companions the conversation he had held with Unicorn, and the promise he had made with respect to them. This restored them all their courage; and with the most affectionate words and marks of the liveliest joy, they thanked the haciennero for the

attempt he had made in their favour. In fact, thanks to the promise of liberating them for a ransom at the end of a week, and treating them well during the period of their captivity, there was nothing so very terrifying about the prospect.

Don Miguel, however, was anxious to retire; so he took leave of his companions and rejoined the chief. The latter repeated his assurance that the prisoners should be free within a week, if they consented each to pay a ransom of one thousand piastres, which was a trifle. He assured the hacendero that he was at liberty to withdraw whenever he pleased.

Don Miguel did not allow the invitation to be repeated. His friends and himself immediately mounted their horses together with the Indians, who were placed in the centre of the detachment; and, after taking leave of Unicorn, the Mexicans dug their spurs into their horses and started at a gallop, glad to have got off so cheaply. The camp fires were soon left far behind them, and General Ibanez then approached his friend, and, bending down to his ear, whispered,—

“Don Miguel, can the Comanches be our allies? I fancy that they have this night given a bold push to the success of our enterprise.”

“I do not know,” the other said with a smile; “but at any rate, my dear general, they are very adroit foes.”

“By Jove!” General Ibanez said, “It must be confessed that these red devils have done us an immense service without suspecting it. It might be said that they acted under a knowledge of facts. This Unicorn, as the chief is called, is a precious man in certain circumstances. I am anxious to cultivate his acquaintance, for no one knows what may happen.”

“You are always jesting, general. When will you be serious for once?” Don Miguel said with a smile.

“What would you have, my friend? We are at this moment staking our heads in a desperate game, so let us at any rate keep our gaiety. If we are conquered it will be time enough then to be sad.”

“Yes, your philosophy is not without a certain dose of fatalism, which renders it more valuable to me. I am happy to see you in this good temper, especially at a moment when we are preparing to play our last card.”

“All is not desperate yet, and I have a secret foreboding, on the contrary, that all is for the best. Our friend, the Trail-hunter, I feel convinced, has something to do, if not all, with what has happened to us.”

“Do you believe it?” Don Miguel asked quickly.

“I am certain of it. You know as well as I do these Indios Bravos, and the implacable hatred they have vowed against us. People do not lay aside in a moment a hatred which has endured for ages. The Comanches know the importance of the prisoners they have seized. How is it they consent so easily to give them up for a trifling ransom? There is some inexplicable mystery in all this.”

“Which is very easy to explain, though,” a laughing voice interrupted from behind the shrubs.

The two Mexicans started, and checked their horses. A man leaped from a thicket, and suddenly appeared in the centre of the track the little band of hunters was following. The latter, believing in a fresh attack, seized their weapons.

“Stop!” Don Miguel said sharply, “the man is alone. Let me speak with him.” Each waited with his hand on his weapon.

“Hold!” Don Miguel continued. “Who are you, my master?”

“Do you not recognise me, Don Miguel? and must I really tell you my name?” the stranger answered.

“The Trail-hunter!” Don Miguel exclaimed.

“Himself,” Valentine continued. “Hang it all! you take a long time to recognise your friends.”

"You will forgive us when you know all that has happened to us, and how much we must keep on our guard."

"Confound it!" Valentine said laughingly, as he regulated his pace by the trot of the horses,— "do you fancy you are going to tell me any news? Did you not really suspect from what quarter the blow came?"

"What!" Don Miguel exclaimed in surprise, "you——"

"Who else but I? Do you think the Spaniards are such friends of the Indians that the latter would treat them so kindly?"

"I was sure of it," General Ibanez affirmed. "I guessed it at the first moment."

"Good heavens! nothing was more simple. Your position, through Red Cedar's treachery, was most critical. I wished to give you the time to turn round by removing, for a few days the obstacles in your way."

"You could not have managed better," exclaimed the general.

"Oh!" Don Miguel said with a reproachful accent, "why did you hide it from me?"

"For a very simple reason, I wished that in these circumstances your will should be free. Had I told you of my plan, it is certain that you would have opposed it. You are a man of honour, Don Miguel."

"My friend——"

"Answer me. Had I explained to you the plan I formed, what would you have done?"

"I should have refused."

"There! you see that I acted wisely in saying nothing to you. In that way your honour is protected, and your conscience easy."

"That is true: still——"

"You must now act at once."

"I ask nothing better. All is ready. Our men are warned, and they will rise at the first signal."

"It must be given immediately."

"I only ask the time to leave my daughter at the hacienda; then, accompanied by my friends, I will march on Paso, while General Ibanez, at the head of a second band, seizes Santa Fé."

"The plan is well conceived. Can you count on the persons who follow you?"

"Yes; they are all my relatives or friends."

"All for the best. Let us not go further. We are here at the place where the roads part: let your horses breathe awhile, and I will tell you a plan I have formed, and which, I think, will please you."

The small party halted. The horsemen dismounted, and lay down on the grass. As all knew of the conspiracy formed by Don Miguel, and were his accomplices in different degrees, this halt did not surprise them, for they suspected that the moment for action was not far off, and that their chief doubtless wished to take his final measures before throwing off the mask, and proclaiming the independence of New Mexico. On inviting them to hunt the wild horses, Don Miguel had not concealed from them Red Cedar's treachery, and the necessity in which he found himself of dealing a great blow, if he did not wish all to be hopelessly lost.

Valentine led the hacendero and the general a short distance apart. When they were out of ear-shot the hunter carefully examined the neighbourhood; then within a few minutes rejoined his friends, whom his way of acting considerably perplexed.

"Caballeros," he said to them, "what do you intend doing? In your position minutes are ages. Are you ready to make your pronunciamiento?"

"Yes," they answered.

"This is what I propose. You, Don Miguel, will proceed direct on Paso. At about half a league from that town you will find Curumilla, with twenty of the best rifles on the frontier. These men, in whom you can trust, are Canadian and Indian hunters devoted to me. They will form the nucleus of a band sufficient for you to seize on Paso without striking a blow, as it is only defended by a garrison of forty soldiers. Does that plan suit you?"

"Perfectly."

"As for you, general, your men have been échelonné by my care in parties of ten and twenty along the Santa Fé road, up to two leagues of the city, so that you will only have to pick them up. In this way you will find yourself, within three hours, at the head of five hundred resolute and well-armed men."

"Why, Valentine, my friend," the general said laughingly, "do you know there is the stuff in you to make a partisan chief, and that I am almost jealous of you."

"Oh! you would be wrong, general: I assure you I am most disinterested in the affair."

"Well, my friend, I know it: you are a free desert hunter, caring very little for our paltry schemes."

"Thanks, Don Miguel: you have judged me correctly. Come, gentlemen, to horse, and start. We must separate here—you, Don Miguel, to proceed by the right-hand track to Paso; you, general, by the left-hand one to Santa Fé; while I, with Don Pablo and his sister, proceed straight on till we reach the Hacienda de la Noria."

"To horse, then!" the hacendero shouted resolutely: "and may God defend the right!"

"Yes," the general added; "for from this moment the revolution is commenced."

The three men returned to their friends. Don Miguel said a few words to his children, and in an instant the whole party were in the saddle.

"The die is cast;" Valentine exclaimed. "May Heaven keep you, gentlemen!"

"Forward!" Don Miguel commanded.

"Forward!" General Ibanez shouted, as he rushed in the opposite direction.

Valentine looked after his departing friends. Their black outlines were soon blended with the darkness, and then the footfalls of their horses died out in the night. Valentine gave a sigh and raised his head.

"God will protect them," he murmured; then turning to the two young people, "Come on, children," he said.

They started, and for some minutes kept silence. Valentine was too busy in thought to address his companions; and yet Dona Clara and Don Pablo, whose curiosity was excited, were burning to question him. At length the girl, by whose side the hunter marched, bent down to him.

"My friend," she said to him in her soft voice, "what is taking place? Why has my father left us, instead of coming to his house?"

"Yes," Don Pablo added, "he seemed agitated when he parted from us. His voice was stern, his words sharp. What is happening, my friend?"

"I implore you, my friend," Dona Clara continued, "do not leave us in this mortal anxiety. The announcement of a misfortune would certainly cause us less pain than the perplexity in which we are."

"Why force me to speak, my children?" the hunter answered in a saddened

voice. "The secret you ask of me is not mine. If your father did not impart his plans to you, it was doubtless because weighty reasons oppose it."

"But I am not a child," Don Pablo exclaimed. "It seems to me that my father ought not to have thus held his confidence from me."

"Do not accuse your father," Valentine answered: "probably he could not have acted otherwise."

"Valentine, Valentine! I will not accept those poor reasons," the young man urged. "In the name of our friendship I insist on your explaining yourself."

"Silence!" the hunter suddenly interrupted him. "I hear suspicious sounds around us."

The three travellers stopped and listened, but all was quiet. The hacienda was about five hundred yards at the most from the spot where they halted. Don Pablo and Dona Clara heard nothing, but Valentine made them a sign to remain quiet.

"Follow me," he said. "Something is happening here which I cannot make out; but it alarms me."

The young people obeyed without hesitation; but they had only gone a few paces when Valentine stopped again.

"Are your weapons loaded?" he sharply asked.

"Yes."

All at once the gallop of a horse urged to its utmost speed was audible.

"Attention!" Valentine muttered.

Still the horseman rapidly advanced, and soon came up to the travellers. Suddenly Valentine bounded like a panther, seized the horse by the bridle, and stopped it.

"Who are you, and where are you going?" he shouted.

"Heaven be praised!" the latter said, not replying to the question. "Perhaps I shall be able to save you. Fly, fly, in all haste!"

"Father Seraphin!" Valentine said with stupor, as he lowered his pistol. "What has happened?"

"Fly, fly!" the missionary repeated, who seemed a prey to the most profound terror.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ABDUCTION.

RED CEDAR and Fray Ambrosio had not remained inactive since their last interview up to the day when Don Miguel set out to hunt the wild horses. These two fellows had manœuvred with extreme skill. Fray Ambrosio, all whose avaricious instincts had been aroused since he had so artfully stolen the secret of his placer. In a few days he found himself at the head of one hundred and twenty adventurers, of whom he felt the more sure as the secret of the expedition was concealed from them, and they fancied they formed a war-party engaged to go scalp-hunting.

Fray Ambrosio, apprehending the effects of mezcal and pulque on his men, had made them bivouac at the entrance of the desert, at a sufficiently great distance from the Paso del Norte to prevent them easily going there. Still Fray Ambrosio, so soon as his expedition was completely organised, had only one desire—to start as speedily as possible; but for two days Red Cedar was

not to be found. At length Fray Ambrosio succeeded in catching him just as he was entering his jacal.

"What has become of you?" he asked him.

"What does that concern you?" the squatter asked brutally.

"I do not say it does: still, connected as we are at this moment, it would be as well for me to know where to find you when I want you. When can we start?"

"At once, but before starting," the squatter continued, becoming serious again, "we have something left to do here. What about Dona Clara, do you fancy we are going to leave her behind?"

"Hum! Then you still think of that?"

"By Jove! more than ever."

"She has gone with her father to a hunt of wild horses."

"The hunt is over, and they are on their return."

"You are well informed."

"It is my trade. Come, do you still mean serving me?"

"If you wish it, it must be so," Fray Ambrosio said with a sigh.

"Are we going to begin again?" the squatter asked in a menacing voice as he rose.

"No, no, it is unnecessary," the monk exclaimed. "I shall expect you."

On which the two accomplices separated. All happened as had been arranged between them. At nine o'clock Red Cedar reached the little gate, which was opened to him by Fray Ambrosio, and the squatter entered the hacienda at the head of his three sons and a party of bandits. The peons, surprised in their sleep, were bound before they even knew what was taking place.

"Now," Red Cedar said, "we are masters of the place, the girl can come as soon as she likes."

"Eh?" the monk went on. "All is not finished yet. Don Miguel is a resolute man, and is well accompanied: he will not let his daughter be carried off under his eyes without defending her."

But the bandits had forgotten Father Seraphin. The missionary, aroused by the unusual noise he heard in the hacienda, had hastily risen. He had heard the few words exchanged between the accomplices, and they were sufficient to make him guess the fearful treachery they meditated. Only listening to his heart, the missionary glided out into the corral, saddled a horse, and opening a door, of which he had a key, so that he could enter or leave the hacienda as his duties required, he started at full speed in the direction he supposed the hunters must follow in returning to the hacienda. Unfortunately Father Seraphin had been unable to effect his flight unheard by the squatter.

"Malediction!" Red Cedar shouted, as he rushed, rifle in hand, toward a window, which he dashed out with his fist, "we are betrayed."

The bandits rushed in disorder into the corral where their horses were tied up, and leaped into their saddles. At this moment a shadow flitted across the plain in front of the squatter, who rapidly shouldered his rifle and fired. Then he went out: a stifled cry reached his ear, but the person still went on.

"No matter," the squatter muttered; "that fine bird has lead in its wing. Sharp, sharp, my men, on the trail!"

And all the bandits rushed off in pursuit of the fugitive.

Father Seraphin had fallen in a fainting condition at Valentine's feet.

Good heavens!" the hunter exclaimed in despair, "what can have happened?"

And he gently carried the missionary into a ditch that ran by the side of the

road. Father Seraphin had his shoulder fractured, and the blood poured in a stream from the wound. The hunter looked around him; but at this moment a confused sound could be heard like the rolling of distant thunder.

"We must fall like brave men, Don Pablo, that is all," he said sharply.

"Be at your ease," the young man answered coldly.

Dona Clara was pale and trembling.

"Come," Valentine said.

And, with a movement rapid as thought, he bounded on to the missionary's horse. The three fugitives started at full speed. This flight lasted a quarter of an hour, and then Valentine stopped. He dismounted, gave the young people a signal to wait, lay down on the ground, and began crawling on his hands and knees, gliding like a serpent through the long grass that concealed him, and stopping at intervals to look around him, and listen attentively to the sounds of the desert. Suddenly he rushed towards his companions, seized the horses by the bridle, and dragged them behind a mound, where they remained concealed, breathless and unable to speak.

A formidable noise of horses was audible. Some twenty black shadows passed like a tornado within ten paces of their hiding-place, not seeing them in consequence of the darkness. Valentine drew a deep breath.

"All hope is not lost," he muttered.

He waited anxiously for five minutes: their pursuers were going further and further away. Presently the sound of their horses' hoofs ceased to disturb the silence of the night.

"To horse!" Valentine said.

They leaped into their saddles and started again, in the direction of the Paso.

"Loosen your bridles," the hunter said: "more still, more still—we are not moving."

Suddenly a loud neigh was borne on the breeze to the ears of the fugitives.

"We are lost," Valentine muttered. "They have found our trail."

Red Cedar was too old a hand on the prairie to be long thrown out: he soon perceived that he was mistaken, and was now turning back, quite certain this time of holding the trail. Then began one of those fabulous races which only the dwellers on the prairie can witness. This pursuit had already lasted two hours, and the fugitives had not lost an inch of ground. Dona Clara with her hair untied and floating in the breeze, with sparkling eye and closely-pressed lips, constantly urged her horse on with voice and hand.

All at once Valentine started, for their pursuers were rapidly approaching.

"Listen," he said. "Do you two let yourselves be captured. I swear to you that if I remain at liberty I will deliver you, even if they hide you in the bowels of the earth." Without replying Don Pablo dismounted, and Valentine leaped on to his horse. "Hope for the best!" he shouted hoarsely.

Don Pablo, so soon as he was alone with his sister, made her dismount, seated her at the foot of a tree, and stood before her with a pistol in either hand. He had not to wait long.

"Surrender!" Red Cedar shouted in a panting voice.

"Here is my answer," said Don Pablo, smiling disdainfully, and with two pistol-shots he laid two bandits low; then he threw away his useless weapons, and crossing his arms said: "Do what you please now: I am avenged."

"Kill that dog!" shouted Red Cedar, as he bounded with fury.

Shaw rushed toward the young man, threw his nervous arms around him, and whispered in his ear,—

"Do not resist, but fall as if dead."

Don Pablo mechanically followed his advice.

"It is all over," said Shaw. "Poor devil! he did not cling to life."

He returned his knife to his belt, threw the supposed corpse over his shoulder, and dragged it into a ditch. At the sight of her brother's body, whom she supposed to be dead, Dona Clara uttered a shriek of despair and fainted. Red Cedar laid the maiden across his saddle-bow, and the whole band, starting at a gallop, were soon lost in the darkness. Don Pablo then rose slowly, and took a sorrowful glance around.

"My poor sister," he murmured, "Valentine alone can save her." Then perceiving her horse near him mounted, and proceeded toward the Paso, asking himself this question, which he found it impossible to answer: "But why did not that man kill me?"

A few paces from the village he perceived two men halting on the road, and conversing with the greatest animation. They hurriedly advanced toward him, and the young man uttered a cry of surprise on recognising them. They were Valentine and Curumilla.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE REVOLT.

DON MIGUEL ZARATE had marched rapidly on the Paso, and an hour after leaving Valentine he saw flashing in the distance the lights that shone in the village windows. The greatest calmness prevailed in the vicinity: only at times could be heard the barking of the dogs, or the savage miauling of the wild cats hidden in the shrubs. At about one hundred yards from the village a man suddenly rose before the small party.

"Who goes there?" he shouted.

"*Mejico y independencia*," the haciennero answered.

"*Que gente?*" the stranger continued.

"Don Miguel Zarate."

At these words twenty men hidden in the brushwood rose suddenly, and throwing their rifles on their shoulders, advanced to meet the horsemen. They were the hunters commanded by Curumilla.

"Well, what is the matter, chief? Have you seen anything alarming?" Don Miguel asked the Indian. "Is there anything new?"

"No," said Curumilla shaking his head; "and yet I have a feeling of treachery."

"How so?"

"I cannot tell you. Apparently everything is as usual: still there is something which is not so. Look you, it is scarce ten o'clock: generally at that hour all the mesons are full, the ventas are crammed with gamblers and drinkers, the streets flocked with promenaders. This night there seems nothing of the sort: all is closed—the town seems abandoned. This tranquillity is factitious. I am alarmed."

Don Miguel was involuntarily struck by the chief's remarks. The haciennero ordered his party to halt, assembled his friends, and held a council. All were of opinion that, before venturing to advance further, they should send as scout a clever man to traverse the town.

One of the hunters offered himself. The conspirators concealed themselves

on either side the road, and awaited, lying in the shrubs, the return of their messenger. He was a half-breed, Simon Munez by name, to whom the Indians had given the sobriquet of "Dog-face." He was short and clumsy, but endowed with marvellous strength; he was an emissary of Red Cedar, and had only joined the hunters in order to betray them.

When he left the conspirators he proceeded toward the village whistling. He had scarce taken a dozen steps into the first street ere a door opened, and a man appeared. This man stepped forward and addressed the hunter.

"You whistle very late, my friend."

"I whistle to wake those who are asleep," the half-breed made answer.

"Come in," the man continued.

Dog-face went in, and the door closed upon him. He remained in the house half an hour, then went out, and hurried back along the road he had traversed.

Red Cedar, who wished before all to avenge himself upon Don Miguel Zarate, had discovered, through Fray Ambrosio, the conspirators' new plan. Without loss of time he had taken his measures in consequence, and had managed so well that, although the general, the governor, and the criminal judge were prisoners, Don Miguel must succumb in the contest he was preparing to provoke. Fray Ambrosio, to his other qualities, joined that of being a listener at doors. In spite of the distrust which his patron was beginning to display toward him on Valentine's recommendation, he had surprised a conversation between Don Miguel and General Ibanez.

Dog-face rejoined his companions after an hour's absence.

"Well?" Don Miguel asked him.

"All is quiet," the half-breed answered; "the inhabitants have retired to their houses, and everybody is asleep."

"You noticed nothing of a suspicious nature?"

"I went through the town from one end to the other, and saw nothing."

"We can advance, then?"

"In all security: it will only be a promenade."

On this assurance the conspirators regained their courage, Curumilla was treated as a visionary, and the order was given to advance.

The plan of the conspirators was very simple. They would march directly on the Cabildo (Town-hall), seize it, and proclaim a Provisional Government. Under present circumstances nothing appeared to be easier. Don Miguel and his band entered the Paso, and nothing occurred to arouse their suspicions. The conspirators advanced into the town with their rifle barrels thrust forward, with eye and ear on the watch, and ready to fire at the slightest alarm; but nothing stirred. As Curumilla had observed, the town was too quiet. This tranquillity hid something extraordinary, and must conceal the tempest. In spite of himself Don Miguel felt a secret apprehension which he could not master.

In the meanwhile the conspirators advanced. They had nearly reached the heart of the town; they were at this moment in a little, dirty, and narrow street, called the Calle de San Isidro, which opens out on the Plaza Mayor, when suddenly a dazzling light illumined the darkness; torches flashed from all the windows; and Don Miguel saw that the two ends of the street in which he was were guarded by strong detachments of cavalry.

"Treachery!" the conspirators shouted in terror.

Curumilla bounded on Dog-face, and buried his knife between his shoulders. The half-breed fell in a lump, quite dead, and not uttering a cry. Don Miguel judged the position at the first glance.

"Let us die!" he said.

"We will!" the conspirators resolutely responded.

Curumilla with the butt of his rifle beat in the door of the nearest house, and rushed in, the conspirators following him. They were soon intrenched on the roof. In Mexico all the houses have flat roofs, formed like terraces.

The troops advanced from each end of the street, while the roofs of all the houses were occupied by soldiers. The battle was about to begin between earth and heaven, and promised to be terrible. At this moment General Guerrero, who commanded the troops, bade them halt, and advanced alone to the house on the top of which the conspirators were intrenched. Don Miguel beat up the guns of his comrades, who aimed at the officer.

"Wait," he said to them; and addressing the General, "What do you want?" he shouted.

"I offer you life and liberty if you consent to surrender your leader," he said.

"Never!" the conspirators shouted in one voice.

"It is my place to answer," Don Miguel said; and then turning to the General, "What assurance do you give me that these conditions will be honourably carried out?"

"My word of honour as a soldier," the General answered.

"Very good," Don Miguel went on; "I accept. All the men who accompany me will leave the town."

"No, we will not!" the conspirators shouted as they brandished their weapons; "we would sooner die."

"Silence!" the haciendero said in a loud voice. "I alone have the right to speak here, for I am your chief. The life of brave men like you must not be needlessly sacrificed. Go, I say; I order you—I implore it of you," he added with tears in his voice. "Perhaps you will soon take your revenge."

The conspirators hung their heads mournfully.

"Well?" the General asked.

"My friends accept. I will remain alone here. If you break your word I will kill myself."

The conspirators came one after the other to embrace Don Miguel, and then went down into the street without being in any way interfered with. Curumilla was the last to depart.

"All is not ended yet," he said to Don Miguel. "Koutonepi will save you, father."

"Chief," the Spaniard said, "I leave my daughter to Valentine, Father Seraphin, and yourself. Watch over her; the poor child will soon have no father."

Curumilla embraced Don Miguel silently and retired. Don Miguel threw down his weapons and descended.

"I am your prisoner," he said.

General Guerrero bowed, and made him a sign to mount the horse a soldier had brought up.

"Where are we going?" the haciendero said.

"To Santa Fé," the General answered, "where you will be tried with General Ibanez, who will doubtless soon be a prisoner like yourself."

"Oh!" Don Miguel muttered thoughtfully, "who betrayed us this time?"

"It was still Red Cedar," the General answered.

A quarter of an hour later the prisoner left the Paso del Norte, escorted by a regiment of dragoons. When the last trooper had disappeared in the windings

of the road three men left the shrubs that concealed them, and stood like three phantoms in the midst of the desolate plain.

"Oh, heavens!" Don Pablo cried in a heart-rending voice, "my father, my sister—who will restore them to me?"

"I!" Valentine said in a grave voice, as he laid his hand on his shoulder. "Am I not the TRAIL-HUNTER?"

CHAPTER XVII.

EL RANCHO DEL COYOTE.

ABOUT a month after the events we have described in the first part of this history, two horsemen, well mounted, and carefully wrapped in their cloaks, entered the town of Santa Fé between three and four o'clock in the afternoon.

Santa Fé, the capital of New Mexico, is a pretty town, built in the midst of a laughing and fertile plain. One of its sides occupies the angle formed by a small stream; it is surrounded by the *adobé* walls of the houses by which it is bordered. The entrance of each street is closed by stakes in the form of palisades; and like the majority of towns in Spanish America, the houses, built only one story high in consequence of the earthquakes, are covered with terraces of well-beaten earth, called *azoteas*, which are a sufficient protection in this glorious climate, where the sky is constantly pure.

An event of immense importance had recently taken place in this town. The two leaders of the conspiracy lately attempted had been transferred to safe keeping at Santa Fé.

Don Miguel and General Ibanez had not pined long in prison. A court-martial, hurriedly convened, had assembled under the presidency of the governor, and the two conspirators were unanimously condemned to be shot.

The hacendero, through his name and position, and especially on account of his fortune, had numerous partisans in the province; hence the announcement of the verdict had caused a profound stupor, which almost immediately changed into anger, among the rich land-owners and the Indians of New Mexico. A dull agitation prevailed throughout the country. The condemned men, whom the governor had not yet dared to place in *capilla*, were still provisionally detained in the prison.

The two men of whom we have spoken rode without stopping through the streets of the town, proceeding toward an unpretending rancho, built on the banks of the stream, at the opposite end of the town from that by which they entered.

"Well," one of the horsemen said, addressing his comrade, "was I not right? You see everyone is asleep; there is nobody to watch us. We have arrived at a capital moment."

"Bah!" the other answered, "do you believe that? In towns there is always somebody watching to see what does not concern him."

"That is possible," the first said, shrugging his shoulders disdainfully. "I care about it as little as I do for a string-halt horse."

"And I too," the other said sharply. "Do you imagine that I care more than you do for the gossips? But stay, this must be the filthy tenement, unless I am mistaken."

"It is the house. I only hope the scamp, Andrés Garote, has not forgotten

the meeting I gave him. Wait a minute, *senor padre*; I will give the agreed on signal."

"It is not worth while, Red Cedar. You know that I am always at your excellency's orders when you please to give them," a mocking voice said from inside the rancho, the door of which immediately opened to give admission to the new comers, and allowed a glimpse of the tall figure and intelligent face of *Andrès Garote* himself.

"*Ave Maria purissima!*" the travellers said.

"*Sin peccado concebida!*" *Andrès* replied taking the horses to the corral, where he unsaddled them and gave each a truss of alfalfa.

The travellers, fatigued by a long journey, sat down on butaccas arranged against the wall, and awaited the host's return, while wiping their dank foreheads and twisting a maize cigarette between their fingers.

"I did not expect you yet," he said as he entered; "but you are welcome. Is there anything new?"

"My fai h, I know nothing but the affair that brings us. It is rather serious, I fancy," Red Cedar remarked.

"*Caspita!* what vivacity, *compadre!*" *Andrès* exclaimed. "But, before talking, I hope you will take some refreshment at any rate. There is nothing like a cup of mezcal or pulque to clear the brain."

"Not to forget," Fray Ambrosio said, "that it is infernally hot, and my tongue is glued to my palate."

"*Cuerpo de Dios!*" *Andrès* said as he went to look for a bottle among several others arranged on a sort of bar, and placed it before the travellers. "Pay attention to that, *senor padre*; for it is serious."

"Give me the remedy, then, chatterer," the monk replied, as he held out his glass.

The mezcal, liberally poured out, was swallowed at a draught by the three men, who put back their glasses on the table with a "hum" of satisfaction.

"And now suppose we talk seriously," Red Cedar said.

"At your orders, *senores caballeros*," *Andrès* replied. "Still if you prefer a hand at montè, you know that I have cards at your service."

"Presently, *Senor Andrès*, presently. Everything will have its turn. Let us first settle our little business," Fray Ambrosio judiciously observed.

The three men made themselves as comfortable as they could, and Red Cedar, after casting a suspicious glance around him, at length took the word.

"You know, *caballeros*," he said, "how, when we thought we had nothing to do but proceed straight to *Apacheria*, the sudden desertion of nearly all our gambusinos checked us. The position was most critical for us, and the abduction of *Dona Clara* compelled us to take the utmost precautions."

"That is true," *Andrès Garote* observed.

"Although certain influential persons protect us under the rose," Red Cedar continued, "we are compelled to keep in the shade as far as we can. I therefore sought to remedy the gravest points in the business. In the first place, the girl was hidden in an inaccessible retreat, and then I began looking for comrades to take the place of those who abandoned us so suddenly."

"Well?" the two men interrupted him sharply.

"At this moment," Red Cedar calmly continued, "when the placers of California call away all the men belonging to the profession, it was certainly no easy task to collect one hundred men of the sort we want, the more so as we shall have to fight the *Indios Bravos* in our expedition."

"I hope, Red Cedar," Fray Ambrosio asked, "that you have not spoken about the placer to your men?"

"Do you take me for a fool? In the first place, I do not wish to make the fortune of the Government while making our own. I have assembled the finest collection of *pícaros* ever brought together for an expedition, all food for the gallows, ruined by *montè*, who do not care for hard blows, and on whom I can fully count, while being very careful not to enlighten them as to the spot whither we propose leading them; for, in that case, I know as well as you do that they would abandon us without the slightest scruples."

"Nothing can be more just," Fray Ambrosio answered. "I am quite of your opinion, Red Cedar."

"We have not an instant to lose," the squatter continued. "This very evening, or to-morrow at the latest, we must set out. Who knows whether we have not already delayed our start too long? Perhaps one of those European vagabonds may have discovered our placer."

Fray Ambrosio cast a suspicious glance at his partner.

"Hum!" he muttered, "that would be very unlucky, for hitherto the business has been well managed."

"For that reason," Red Cedar hastened to add, "I only suggest a doubt—nothing more."

"Come, Red Cedar," the monk said, "you have yourself narrated all the embarrassments of our position. Why, then, complicate the gravity of our situation still more?"

"I do not understand you, *senor padre*. Be good enough to explain yourself more clearly."

"I allude to the young girl you carried off."

"Ah, ah!" Red Cedar said, with a grin, "is that where the shoe pinches you, comrade? I am vexed at it; but I will not answer your question. If I carried off that woman, it was because I had pressing reasons to do so."

"Still it appears to me that, regarding the terms on which we stand to each other——"

"What can there be in common between the abduction of *Dona Clara* and the discovery of a placer in the heart of *Apacheria*?"

"Still——" the monk insisted.

"Enough of that!" Red Cedar shouted. "I will not hear another word on this subject."

At this moment two smart blows were heard on the carefully-bolted door.

The three men started, and Red Cedar broke off.

"Shall I open?" *Andrès* asked.

"Yes," Fray Ambrosio answered: "hesitation or refusal might give an alarm."

Red Cedar consented with a toss of the head, and the *ranchero* went with an ill grace toward the door, which was being struck as if about to be beaten in.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CUCHILLADA.

So soon as the door was opened two men appeared. The first was *Curumilla*; the other, wrapped up in a large cloak, and with his broad-brimmed hat drawn over his eyes, entered the room, making the Indian chief a sign to follow him. The latter was evidently a Mexican.

"*Santas tardés!*" he said, as he raised his hand.

"*Dios las de a usted buenas!*" the rancho answered. "What shall I serve to your excellencies?"

"A bottle of mezcal," the stranger said.

The new comers seated themselves at a table at the end of the room, at a spot which the light reached in such a weakened state that it was almost dark. When they were served each poured out a glass of liquor, which he drank; and leaning his head on his hands, the Mexican appeared plunged in deep thought, not occupying himself the least in the world about the persons near him. Curumilla crossed his arms on his chest, half closed his eyes, and remained motionless.

At length Red Cedar, doubtless more impatient than his comrades, and wishful to know at once what he had to expect, rose, filled his glass, and turned toward the strangers.

"Senores caballeros," he said, imitating that exquisite politeness which the Mexicans possess in the highest degree, "I have the honour of drinking to your health."

At this invitation Curumilla remained insensible as a granite statue: his companion slowly raised his head, fixed his eye for a moment on the speaker, and answered in a loud and firm voice,—

"It is needless, senor, for I shall not drink to yours."

Fray Ambrosio rose violently.

"What do you say?" he exclaimed in a threatening voice. "Do you mean to insult us?"

"There are people whom a man cannot insult," the stranger continued. "Remember this, senor padre, I do not wish to have any dealings with you."

"Why so?"

"Because I do not please, that is all. Now, gentlemen, do not trouble yourselves about me, I beg, but continue your conversation: it was most interesting when I arrived. You were speaking, I believe, about an expedition you are preparing: there was a question, too, I fancy, when I entered, about a girl your worthy friend or partner, I do not know which he is, carried off with your assistance. Do not let me disturb you. I should, on the contrary, be delighted to learn what you intend doing with that unhappy young creature."

No words could render the feeling of stupor and terror which seized on the three partners at this crushing revelation of their plans.

But Red Cedar and Fray Ambrosio were men too hardened in iniquity for any event, however grave in its nature, to crush them for long. The first moment past they recovered themselves, and amazement gave way to fury. The monk drew from his vaquera boot a knife, and posted himself before the door to prevent egress; while Red Cedar, with frowning brow and a machete in his hand, advanced resolutely toward the table, behind which their bold adversary, standing with folded arms, seemed to defy them by his ironical smile.

"Whoever you may be," Red Cedar said, stopping two paces from his opponent, "chance has made you master of a secret that kills, and you shall die."

"Do you really believe that I owe a knowledge of your secrets to chance?" the other said.

"Defend yourself," Red Cedar howled furiously, "if you do not wish me to assassinate you; for *con mil diablos!* I shall not hesitate, I warn you."

"I know it," the stranger replied quietly. "I shall not be the first person to whom that has happened: the Sierra Madre and El Bolson de Mapimi have often heard the agonising cries of your victims."

At this allusion to his frightful trade, the squatter yelled in a choking voice—
“You lie! I am a hunter.”

“Of scalps,” the stranger immediately retorted, “unless you have given up that lucrative and honourable profession since your last expedition to the Coras.”

“Oh!” the squatter shouted, with an indescribable burst of fury, “he’s a coward who hides his face while uttering such words.”

“The stranger shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and let the folds of his mantle fall sharply.

“Do you recognise me, Red Cedar, since your conscience has not yet whispered my name to you?”

“Oh!” the three men exclaimed in horror, and instinctively recoiling, “Don Pablo de Zarate!”

“Yes,” the young man continued, “Don Pablo, who has come, Red Cedar, to ask of you an account of his sister, whom you carried off.”

“Ah!” said Red Cedar, in a hollow voice, “do the dead, then, leave the tomb?”

“Yes,” the young man shouted loudly, “they leave the tomb to tear your victims from you. Red Cedar, restore me my sister.”

The squatter leaped like a hyena on the young man, brandishing his machete.

“Dog!” he yelled, “I will kill you a second time.”

But his wrist was suddenly seized by a hand of iron, and the bandit tottered back to the wall of the rancho, against which he was forced to lean, lest he should roll on the ground. Curumilla, who had hitherto remained an impassive witness of the scene that took place before him, had thought the moment for interference had arrived, and had sharply hurled him back. The squatter, with eyes injected with blood, and lips clenched by rage, looked around him with glaring worthy of a wild beast.

“Red Cedar,” repeated Don Pablo, in a calm voice, “give me back my sister.”

“Never!” the squatter answered in a voice choked by rage.

In the meanwhile the monk and the ranchero had treacherously approached the young man, watching for the propitious moment to fall on him. The five men assembled in this room offered a strange and sinister scene by the uncertain light that filtered through the windows, as each stood with his hand on his weapon, ready to kill or be killed, and only waiting the opportunity to rush on his enemy. There was a moment of supreme silence. Assuredly these men were brave. At length Don Pablo spoke again.

“Take care, Red Cedar,” he said. “I have come to meet you alone and honourably. I have asked you for my sister several times, and you have not answered.”

“I will sell your sister to the Apaches!” the squatter howled. “As for you, accursed one, you shall not leave this room alive.”

“The scoundrel is mad!” the young man said contemptuously.

He fell back a pace, and then stopped.

“Listen,” he continued. “I will now retire, but we shall meet again; and woe to you then, for I shall be as pitiless to you as you have been.

“Oh! you shall not go in that way, my master,” replied the squatter, who had regained all his boldness and impudence. “Did I not tell you I would kill you?”

The young man fixed upon him a glance of undefinable expression, and crossed his arms boldly on his chest.

“Try it,” he said in a voice rendered harsh by the fury boiling in his heart.

Red Cedar uttered a yell of rage, and bounded on Don Pablo. The latter calmly awaited the attack; but so soon as the squatter was within reach, he suddenly took off his mantle, and threw it over his enemy's head, who, blinded by the folds of the thick garment, rolled about on the ground, unable to free himself from the accursed cloth that held him like a net.

At this moment Fray Ambrosio rushed upon him, trying to bury his knife in his chest. Feeling not the slightest alarm, Don Pablo seized his assailant's wrist, and with a strength he was far from anticipating, twisted his arm so violently that his fingers opened, and he let the knife fall with a yell of pain. Don Pablo picked it up, and seized the monk by the throat.

"Listen, villain!" he said to him. "I am master of your life. You betrayed my father, who took pity on you, and received you into his house. I could kill you, and perhaps ought to do so; but it would be robbing the executioner. This gown, of which you are unworthy, saves your life; but I will mark you so that you shall never forget me."

And placing the point of the knife on the monk's livid face, he made two gashes in the shape of a cross along the whole length and breadth of his face.

"We shall meet again," he added in a thundering voice, as he threw the knife away in disgust.

By the aid of the ranchero Red Cedar presently succeeded in freeing himself from the folds of the cloak that embarrassed him. When the three accomplices found themselves alone again, an expression of impotent rage and deadly hatred distorted their faces.

"Oh!" the squatter muttered, grinding his teeth, and raising his fist to heaven, "I will be revenged."

"And I too," said Fray Ambrosio in a hollow voice, as he wiped away the blood that stained his face.

"Hum! I do not care," Andrès Garote said to himself aside. "That family of the Zarates is a fine one; but, *carai!* it must be confessed that Don Pablo is a rough fellow."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HUNTERS.

AT about two leagues from Santa Fé, in a clearing situated on the banks of the stream which borders that town, and on the evening of the same day, a man was seated before a large fire, which he carefully kept up, while actively engaged in making preparations for supper. A frugal meal, at any rate, this supper! It was composed of a buffalo hump, a few potatoes, and maize tortillas baked on the ashes, the whole washed down with pulque.

All at once the sound of galloping horses could be heard in the forest, and two riders burst into the clearing. On seeing them the hunter uttered an exclamation of joy, and hurried to meet them. They were Don Pablo and Curumilla.

"Heaven be praised!" the hunter said. "Here you are at last. I was beginning to grow alarmed at your long absence."

"You see that nothing has happened to me," the young man answered.

Don Pablo had dismounted, and hobbled his own horse and Curumilla's near Valentine, while the Indian chief busied himself in preparing the supper.

"Come, come," the hunter said gaily, "to table. You must be hungry, and I am dying of inanition."

The three men went to the table; that is, they seated themselves on the grass in front of the fire, and vigorously assailed their meagre repast.

"Now," Valentine asked presently, "what have you done? I fancy you remained much longer than was necessary in that accursed town."

"We did, my friend. Certain reasons forced me to remain longer than I had at first intended."

"Proceed in regular order, if you have no objection."

"Act as you please, my friend."

"Very good: the chief and I will light our Indian pipes while you make your cigarette. We will sit with our backs to the fire, so as to watch the neighbourhood, and in that way can converse without apprehension. Have you seen Father Seraphin?"

"Yes, I have. Our poor friend is still very weak and pale, and his wound is scarce cicatrised. Still, paying no heed to his sufferings, and deriving strength from his unbounded devotion to humanity, he has done all we agreed on. For the last week he has only left my father to hasten to his judges. He has seen the general, the governor, the bishop—everybody, in short. But all his exertions have hitherto been fruitless."

"Patience!" the hunter said with a smile.

"Father Seraphin believes for certain that my father will be placed in the capilla within two days."

"Two days are a long time, my friend: before they have elapsed many things may have occurred."

"That is true; but my father's life is at stake"

"Good, Don Pablo; I like to hear you speak so. But reassure yourself: all is going on well, I repeat."

"Still, my friend, I believe it would be wise to take certain precautions. Remember it is a question of life or death, and we must make haste. How many times, under similar circumstances, have the best arranged plans failed! Do you think that your measures are well taken?"

"Listen, Don Pablo de Zarate," said Valentine. "I have said that I will save your father, and mean to do so. Still I wish him to leave the prison in which he now is, like a man of his character ought to leave it, in open day, greeted by the applause of the crowd, and not by escaping furtively during the night, like a vile criminal. Your father shall leave his prison, but begged to do so by the governor himself, and all the authorities of Santa Fé. To regain your courage, and no longer doubt one man."

"Pardon me, my friend," answered Pablo. "I know how devoted you are to my family; but I suffer, and grief renders me unjust. Forgive me."

"Child, let us forget it all. Was the town quiet to-day?"

"I cannot tell you, for I was so absorbed in thought that I saw nothing going on around me. Still I fancy there was a certain amount of agitation."

Valentine indulged once again in that strange smile that had already played round the corners of his lips.

"Good!" he said. "And did you, as I advised, try to gain any information about Red Cedar?"

Don Pablo described the scene that had taken place in the rancho. The hunter listened to it with the utmost attention, and when it was finished he shook his head several times.

"All young people are so," he muttered: "they always allow their passions to carry them beyond the bounds of reason. You were wrong, Don Pablo," he added. "Red Cedar believed you dead, and that might have been of great

use to us presently. You do not know the immense power that demon has at his disposal: all the bandits on the frontier are devoted to him."

"Still, my friend——"

"You acted like a madman in arousing the slumbering fury. Red Cedar will persist in destroying you. But that is not the worst you have done."

"What is it, then?"

"Why, madman as you are, instead of keeping dark, watching your enemies without saying a word—in short, seeing through their game—by an unpardonable act of bravado you have unmasked all your batteries."

"I do not understand you, my friend."

"Fray Ambrosio is a villain of a different stamp from Red Cedar, it is true; but I consider him even a greater scoundrel than the scalp-hunter. That man is a hypocrite. He owes all to your family, and is furious at seeing treachery discovered. Take care, Don Pablo. You have made at one blow two implacable enemies."

"It is true," the young man said; "I acted like a fool. But what would you? At the sight of those two men I was no longer master of myself."

"Yes, yes, the cuchillada was a fine one. Certainly the bandit deserved it; but I fear lest the cross you so smartly drew on his face will cost you dearly some day."

"Well, let us leave it in the hands of Heaven. Provided my father escape the fate that menaces him, I shall be happy."

"Did you learn nothing further?"

"Yes; Red Cedar's gambusinos are encamped a short distance from us. I know that their chief intends starting to-morrow at the latest."

"Oh, oh! already? We must make haste and prepare our ambuscade."

The three men made their preparations; the horses were saddled, the small skins the horseman always carries at his saddle-bow in these dry countries were filled with water, and five minutes later were about to mount. At the moment they were leaving the clearing a rustling of leaves was heard, the branches parted, and an Indian appeared. It was Unicorn, the great sachem of the Comanches. Valentine advanced to meet the Indian.

"My brother is welcome," he said. "What does he want of me?"

"To see the face of a friend," the chief answered.

The two men then bowed after the fashion of the prairie. After this ceremony Valentine went on:—

"My father must approach the fire, and smoke from the calumet of his white friends."

"I will do so," Unicorn answered.

And drawing near the fire, he crouched down in Indian fashion, took his pipe from his belt, and smoked in silence. At length Unicorn shook the ashes from his calumet, returned it to his belt, and addressed Valentine.

"Is my brother setting out to hunt buffaloes again?" he said.

"Yes," the Frenchman replied, "we are going hunting. Does my brother intend to accompany us?"

"No; my heart is sad."

"What means the chief?"

"Does not my brother understand me, or am I really mistaken? Is it that my brother only really loves the buffaloes, whose meat he eats, and whose hides he sells at the *tolderia*?"

"Let my brother explain himself more clearly; then I will try to answer him."

There was a moment of silence. The Indian seemed to be reflecting deeply:

his nostrils were dilated, and at times his black eye flashed fire. At length he raised his head, restored all the serenity to his glance, and said in a soft and melodious voice—

"Why pretend not to understand me, Koutonepi? A warrior must not have a forked tongue. What a man cannot do alone, two can attempt and carry out. Let my brother speak: the ears of a friend are open."

"My brother is right. I will not deceive his expectations. The hunt I wish to make is serious. I am anxious to save a woman of my colour; but what can the will of one man effect?"

"Koutonepi is not alone: I see at his side the best two rifles of the frontier. What does the white hunter tell me? Is he no longer the great warrior I knew? Does he doubt the friendship of his brother Habouzetle?"

"I never doubted the friendship of my brother. I am an adopted son of his nation. At this very moment is he not seeking to do me a service?"

"That service is only half what I wish to do. Let my brother speak, and two hundred Comanche warriors shall join him to deliver the virgin of the pale-faces."

Valentine started with joy at this noble offer.

"Thanks, chief," he said eagerly. "I accept; and I know that your word is sacred."

"Michabou protects us," the Indian said, "My brother can count on me. A chief does not forget a service. I owe obligations to the pale hunter, and will deliver to him the gachupino robbers."

"Here is my hand, chief: my heart has long been yours."

"My brother speaks well. I have done what he requested of me."

And bowing courteously, the Comanche chief withdrew without adding a word.

"Don Pablo," Valentine exclaimed joyously, "I can now guarantee your father's safety: this night—perhaps to-morrow—he will be free."

A few minutes later the hunters left the clearing to go in search of the gam-businos, and prepare their ambushade.

CHAPTER XX.

SUNBEAM.

WE will now go a little way back, in order to clear up certain portions of the conversation between Valentine and Unicorn, whose meaning the reader cannot have caught.

Only a few months after their arrival in Apacheria the Frenchman and Curumilla were hunting the buffalo on two banks of the Rio Gila. It was a splendid day in the month of July. The two hunters, fatigued by a long march made under the beams of the parching sun, that fell vertically on their heads, had sheltered themselves under a clump of cedar-wood trees, and, carelessly stretched out on the ground, were smoking while waiting till the great heat had passed, and the evening breeze rose to enable them to continue their hunt. A quarter of elk was roasting for their dinner.

"Eh, *penni!*" Valentine said, addressing his comrade, and rising on his elbow, "the dinner seems to be ready; so suppose we feed? The sun is rapidly sinking behind the virgin forest, and we shall soon have to start again."

"Eat," Curumilla answered sharply.

The meat was laid on a leaf between the two hunters. Valentine had taken a third bite when he stopped, with his arm raised and his head bent forward, as if an unusual sound had suddenly smitten his ear. Curumilla imitated his friend, and both listened with that deep attention that only results from a lengthened desert life; for on the prairie every sound is suspicious—every meeting is feared, especially with man.

Some time elapsed ere the noise which startled the hunters was repeated. For a moment they fancied themselves deceived, and Valentine took another bite, when he was again checked. This time he had distinctly heard a sound resembling a stifled sigh, but so weak and hollow that it needed the Trail-hunter's practised ear to catch it. Curumilla himself had perceived nothing. Valentine rose hurriedly, seized his rifle, and rushed in the direction of the river, his friend following him in all haste.

It was from the river, in fact, that the sigh heard by Valentine had come, and fortunately it was but a few paces distant, where a fearful sight presented itself to their startled eyes. A long plank was descending the river, turning on its axis, and borne by the current, which ran rather strongly at this point. On this plank was fastened a woman, who held a child in her clasped arms. Each time the plank revolved the unhappy woman plunged with her child into the stream, and at ten yards at the most from it an enormous cayman was swimming vigorously to snap at its two victims.

Valentine raised his rifle. Curumilla at the same moment glided into the water, holding his knife-blade between his teeth, and swam toward the plank. Valentine remained for a few seconds motionless, as if changed into a block of marble. All at once he pulled the trigger, and the discharge was re-echoed by the distant mountains. The cayman leaped out of the water, and plunged down again; but it reappeared a moment later, belly upwards. It was dead. Valentine's bullet had passed through its eye.

In the mean while Curumilla had reached the plank with a few strokes. Without loss of time he turned it in the opposite direction from what it was following; and while holding it so that it could not revolve, he pushed it on to the sand. In two strokes he cut the bonds that held the hapless woman, seized her in his arms, and ran off with her to the bivouac fire.

The poor woman gave no signs of life, and the two hunters eagerly sought to restore her. She was an Indian, apparently not more than eighteen, and very beautiful. Valentine found great difficulty in loosening her arms and removing the baby; for the frail creature, about a year old, by an incomprehensible miracle, had been preserved—thanks, doubtless, to its mother's devotion. It smiled pleasantly at the hunter when he laid it tenderly on a bed of dry leaves.

Presently the woman was squatting by the fire, nursing her child, and lulling it to sleep by singing an Indian song. The night passed tranquilly, the two hunters watching in turn over the slumbers of the woman they had saved, and who reposed in peace.

At sunrise she awoke; and, with the skill and handiness peculiar to the women of her race, she rekindled the fire and prepared breakfast. The two men looked at her with a smile, then threw their rifles over their shoulders, and set out in search of game. When they returned to the bivouac the meal was ready. After eating, Valentine lit his Indian pipe, seated himself at the foot of a tree, and addressed the young woman.

She then explained that her name was Sunbeam, that she was the wife of a chief called Unicorn. She had been stolen by an Apache savage, who to revenge himself for her rejection of his love had treated her in the way they had

seen. While she was still telling her story, the song of the maukawis was heard at a short distance off. The two hunters raised their heads in surprise, and looked around them.

"The quail sings very late, I fancy," Valentine muttered suspiciously.

The Indian girl smiled, but gave no answer. Suddenly a light cracking of dry branches disturbed the silence. Valentine and Curumilla made a move, as if to spring up and seize their rifles that lay by their side.

"My brothers must not stir," the squaw said quickly; "it is a friend."

The hunters remained motionless, and the girl then imitated with rare perfection the cry of the blue jay. The bushes parted, and an Indian warrior, perfectly painted and armed for war, bounded like a jackal over the grass and herbs that obstructed his passage, and stopped in face of the hunters. This warrior was Unicorn. He saluted the two men with that grace innate in the Indian race; then he crossed his arms on his breast, and waited, without taking a glance at his squaw, or even appearing to have seen her. On her side the Indian woman did not stir.

"Unicorn is welcome to our camp," said Valentine. "Let him take a seat by the fire of his brothers, and share with them the provisions they possess."

"I will take a seat by the fire of my pale-face brother," he replied; "but he must first answer me a question I wish to ask him."

"My brother can speak; my ears are open."

"Good!" the chief answered. "How is it the hunters have with them Unicorn's wife?"

"Sunbeam can answer that question best," Valentine said gravely.

"I am waiting," the chief remarked.

The Indian woman repeated, word for word, to her husband the story she had told a few minutes before. Unicorn listened without evincing either surprise or wrath; his face remained impassive, but his brows were imperceptibly contracted. When the woman had finished speaking, the Comanche chief bowed his head on his chest, and remained for a moment plunged in serious thought. Presently he raised his head.

"Who saved Sunbeam from the river when she was about to perish?" he asked her.

"These hunters," she replied.

"Good!" the chief said laconically, as he bent on the two men a glance full of the most unspeakable gratitude.

"Could we leave her to perish?" Valentine said.

"My brothers did well. Unicorn is one of the first sachems of his nation. His tongue is not forked; he gives his heart once and takes it back no more. Unicorn's heart belongs to the hunters."

These simple words were uttered with the majesty and grandeur the Indians know so well how to assume when they think proper. The two men vowed their gratitude, and the chief continued:—

"Unicorn is returning to his village with his wife; his young men are awaiting him twenty paces from here. He would be happy if the hunters would consent to accompany him there."

"Chief," Valentine answered, "we came into the prairie to hunt the buffalo."

"Well, what matter? My brothers will hunt with me and my young men; but if they wish to prove to me that they accept my friendship, they will follow me to my village."

"The chief is mounted, while we are on foot."

"I have horses."

Any further resistance would have been a breach of politeness, and the hunters accepted the invitation. Valentine, whom accident had brought on to the prairies of the Rio Gila and Del Norte, was in his heart not sorry to make friends there, and have allies on whose support he could reckon in case of need. The squaw had by this time risen; she timidly approached her husband, and held up the child, saying in a soft and frightened voice—

"Kiss this warrior."

The chief took the frail creature in his muscular arms, and kissed it repeatedly with a display of extraordinary tenderness, and then returned it to the mother. The latter wrapped the babe in a small blanket, then placed it on a plank shaped like a cradle, and covered with dry moss, fastened a hood over the place where its head rested, to guard it from the burning beams of the sun, and hung the whole on her back by means of a woollen strap passing over her forehead.

"I am ready," she said.

"Let us go," the chief replied.

The hunters followed him, and they were soon on the prairie; and before many days adopted into the tribe of the generous chief.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MISSIONARY.

WITH time the relations existing between the hunters and the Indians were drawn closer, and became more friendly. In the desert physical strength is the quality most highly esteemed. Man, compelled to struggle incessantly against the dangers of every description that rise each moment before him, is bound to look only to himself for the means to surmount them. Hence the Indians profess a profound contempt for sickly people, and weak and timid nerves.

Valentine easily induced Unicorn to seize, during the hunt of the wild horses, the Mexican magistrates, in order to make hostages of them if the conspiracy were unsuccessful. What the hunter foresaw happened. Red Cedar had opposed stratagem to stratagem; and as we have seen Don Miguel was arrested in the midst of his triumph, at the very moment when he fancied himself master of the Paso del Norte.

After Valentine, Curumilla, and Don Pablo had seen, from their hiding-place in the bushes, the mournful escort pass that was taking Don Miguel as a prisoner to Santa Fé, they held a council. The prisoner must be saved. Valentine, with that promptitude of decision, which formed the salient point of his character, soon arranged in his head one of those bold schemes which only he could discover.

"Courage!" he said to Don Pablo. "As long as the heart beats in the breast there is hope."

"Speak, my friend," said Don Pablo, who had entire faith in Valentine: he had often been in the position to try his friend, and these words gave him back that courage so necessary to him. "What is to be done?"

"Let us attend to the most important thing first, and save Father Seraphin, who devoted himself for us."

The three men started. The night was a gloomy one. The moon only ap-

peared at intervals: incessantly veiled by thick clouds which passed over its disc, it seemed to shed its sickly rays regretfully on the earth. The wind whistled through the branches of the trees, which uttered mysterious murmurs as they came into collision. The coyotes howled in the plain, and at times their sinister forms shot athwart the sky-line. After a march of about an hour the three men approached the spot where the missionary had fallen from the effect of Red Cedar's bullet; but he had disappeared. An alarm mingled with a frightful agony contracted the hunters' hearts. Valentine took a despairing glance around; but the darkness was too dense for him possibly to distinguish anything.

"What is to be done?" Don Pablo asked sadly.

"Seek," Valentine replied sharply: "he cannot be far."

Curumilla had already taken up the trail, and had disappeared in the gloom.

The two men stood motionless, listening to the mysterious sounds of the desert, that nameless melody which plunges the soul into a soft reverie. Nearly an hour passed thus, nothing revealing to the hunters that Curumilla's search had proved successful. Valentine, growing impatient at this long delay, was also preparing to go on the trail, when all at once the weak snapping cry of the walkon rose in the air.

"What's that?" Don Pablo asked in surprise.

"Silence!" Valentine muttered.

A second time the walkon sang, but this time stronger, and much nearer. Valentine raised his fingers to his lips, and imitated the sharp, shrill yell of the ocelot twice with such perfection, that Don Pablo started involuntarily, and looked round for the wild beast, whose eyes he fancied he could see flashing behind a thicket. Almost immediately the note of the walkon was heard a third time.

"Good!" said Valentine. "Curumilla has found Father Seraphin."

The young man looked at him in amazement. The hunter smiled.

"They will both arrive directly, he said."

"How do you know?"

"Child!" Valentine interrupted him, "in the desert the human voice is more injurious than useful. The song of birds, the cry of wild beasts, serve us as language."

"Yes," the young man answered simply, "that is true. I have often heard it stated; but I was not aware you could understand one another so easily."

"That is nothing," the hunter remarked good-humouredly: "you will see much more."

In a few moments the sound of footsteps became audible, at first faint, then gradually coming nearer, and two shadows were dimly drawn on the night.

"It is Curumilla," said Valentine. "Let us go to meet him."

Don Pablo followed him, and they soon reached the Indian, who walked slowly, obliged as he was to support, almost carry, the missionary.

When Father Seraphin fell off his horse he almost immediately lost his senses. He remained for a long time lying in the ditch, but by degrees the night cold had brought him round again. At the first moment the poor priest, whose ideas were still confused, had cast anxious glances around him, while asking himself how he came there, and by what concourse of strange events it had happened. He tried to rise; but then a poignant pain he felt in his shoulder reminded him of what had occurred. Still he did not despair.

"O God!" he cried, "deign to support Thy servant, for he has set on Thee all his hope and confidence."

Prayer, when made with faith, produces in a man an effect whose consequences are immediate: it consoles him, gives him courage, and almost restores him the strength that has deserted him. This was what happened to Father Seraphin. After uttering these few words he set out boldly, supporting his tottering footsteps with a stick, which a providential chance had placed in his way. He walked thus for nearly half a league, stopping at every instant to draw breath; but human endurance has limits beyond which it cannot go. In spite of the efforts he made, the missionary at length felt his legs give way under him; he understood that he could not go further; and he sank at the foot of a tree, certain that he had attempted impossibilities, and henceforth resigning to Providence the care of saving him.

It was at this moment Curumilla arrived near him. The Indian aided him to rise, and then warned his comrades of the success of his search. Father Seraphin, though the chief offered to carry him, refused, and wished to walk to join his friends; but his strength deserted him a second time, he lost his senses, and fell into the arms of the Indian, who watched him attentively; for he noticed his increasing weakness, and foresaw his fall. Valentine and Curumilla hastily constructed a litter of tree branches, on which they placed the poor wounded man, and raising him on their shoulders, went off with him rapidly. The night passed away, and the sun was already high on the horizon, and yet the hunters were marching. At length, at about eleven o'clock, they reached the cavern which served Valentine as a shelter, and to which he had resolved to carry his patient, that he might himself nurse him.

Father Seraphin was in a raging fever; his face was red, his eyes flashing. As nearly always happens with gun-shot wounds, a suppurating fever had declared itself. The missionary was laid on a bed of furs, and Valentine immediately prepared to probe the wound. By a singular chance the ball had lodged in the shoulder without fracturing the blade-bone. Valentine drew it; and then helped by Curumilla, who had quietly pounded oregano leaves, he formed a cataplasm, which he laid on the wound, after first carefully washing it. Scarcely had this been done ere the missionary fell into a deep sleep, which lasted till nightfall.

Valentine's treatment had effected wonders. The fever had disappeared, the priest's features were calmed, the flush that purpled his cheeks had given place to a pallor caused by the loss of blood; in short, he was as well as could be expected. On opening his eyes he perceived the three hunters watching him anxiously. He smiled, and said in a weak voice,

"Thanks, my brothers, thanks for the help you have afforded me. Heaven will reward you. I feel much better."

"The Lord be praised!" Valentine answered. "You will escape, my father, more cheaply than I had dared to hope. Your wound, though serious, is not dangerous, and in a few days you can, if you think necessary, resume your avocations."

"Can it be possible? I thank you for this good news, my dear Valentine. I no longer count the times I have owed my life to you. Heaven, in its infinite goodness has placed you near me to support me in my tribulations, and succour me in days of danger."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE INTERVIEW.

At daybreak the next morning, Curumilla started for Unicorn's village. At sunset he returned to the cavern, accompanied by the Comanche chief. The sachem entertained the most profound respect for Father Seraphin, whose noble character he could appreciate.

"Father," he said to him as he kissed his hand, "who are the villians who thus wounded you, to whom the Master of Life has imparted the secret to make us happy? Whoever they may be, these men shall die."

"My son," the priest answered gently, "I will not pronounce before you the name of the unhappy man who, in a moment of madness, raised his hand against me. My God is a God of peace; He is merciful, and recommends his creatures to forget injuries."

The Indian looked at him in amazement. He did not understand the soft and touching sublimity of these precepts of love.

"My son," Father Seraphin continued, you are a great warrior. Many a time you have braved the atrocious tortures of the stake of blood, a thousand fold more terrible than death itself. Often have you, with a pleasure I excuse (for it is your nature), thrown down your enemy, and planted your knee on his chest. Have you never pardoned anybody in fight?"

"Never!" the Indian answered, his eyes sparkling with satisfied pride. "Unicorn has sent many Apache dogs to the happy hunting grounds: their scalps are drying at the door of his cabin."

"Well," the missionary said gently, "try clemency once, only once, and you will know one of the greatest pleasures God has granted to man on this earth."

"No," said the chief; "a dead enemy is no longer to be feared."

"My son, you love me, I believe?"

"Yes. My father is good; he has behaved well to the Comanches, and they are grateful. Let my father command, and his son will obey."

"I can only ask a favour of you."

"Good! My father can explain himself. Unicorn will do what he desires."

"Well then," said the missionary with a lively feeling of joy, "promise me to pardon the first unhappy man, whoever he may be, who falls into your hands, and you will render me happy."

The chief frowned, and an expression of dissatisfaction appeared on his features. Father Seraphin anxiously followed on the Comanche's intelligent countenance the different shadows reflected on it as in a mirror. At length the Indian regained his stoicism and his face grew serene again.

"Be it so; my father shall be satisfied. I promise him to pardon the first enemy whom the Manitou causes to fall beneath the point of my lance."

"Thanks, chief," the missionary exclaimed joyfully, "thanks! Heaven will reward you for this good idea."

The Indian bowed silently and turned to Valentine, who had been listening to the conversation.

"My brother called me, and I came. What does he want of Unicorn?"

"My brother will take his seat at the council fire, and smoke the calumet with his friend. Chiefs do not speak without reflecting on the words they are about to utter."

"My brother speaks well, and I will take my seat at his fire."

Curumilla had lighted a large fire in the first grotto of the cavern. The four men

left Father Seraphin to take a few moments' rest, and seated themselves round the fire, when the calumet passed from hand to hand. The Indians never undertake anything important, or commence a discussion, without first smoking the calumet in council, whatever may be the circumstances in which they are placed. When the calumet had gone the round Valentine rose.

"Every day," he said bowing to the chief, "I appreciate more and more the honour the Comanches did me in adopting me as a son. My brother's nation is powerful; its hunting grounds cover the whole surface of the earth. To-day I have again a service to ask of my brother, and will he do it me? I presume so; for I know his heart, and that the Great Spirit of the Master of Life dwells in him."

"Let my brother explain," Unicorn answered. "He is speaking to a chief: he must remove the skin from his heart, and let his blood flow red and bright before a friend. The great white hunter is a portion of myself."

"Thanks, brother," Valentine said, with emotion. "Your words have passed from your lips into my breast, which they have rejoiced. I am not mistaken. I see that I can ever count on your well-tryed friendship and honest aid. Acumaypictzin de Zarate, the descendant of the Mexican kings, the friend of the red-skins, whom he has ever protected, is a prisoner to the gachupinos."

"And what does my brother want?"

"I wish to save my friend."

"Good!" the chief answered. "My brother claims my help to succeed in that project, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Good! The descendant of the Tlatoanis shall be saved. My brother can feel reassured."

"I can count, then, on my brother's aid?" Valentine asked quickly.

"Unicorn holds in his hands Spaniards who will answer for the life of the prisoner."

"That is true!" Valentine exclaimed as he struck his forehead. "Your idea is a good one, chief."

"My brother will leave me to act. I answer for success on my head."

"*Caramba!* act as you please, chief. Still, were it only for form's sake, I should not be sorry to know what you intend doing."

"Unicorn will go to Santa Fé to speak with the chief of the white men. Have I not hostages?" he said.

"That is true," Valentine remarked.

"The Spaniards are," the chief went on, "like chattering old women, prodigal of seductive words; but Unicorn knows them. How many times already has he trodden the war-path on their territory at the head of his warriors! They will not dare to deceive him."

"My heart is full of gratitude toward my red brother."

"Good! What is that to Unicorn? Less than nothing. Has my brother anything else to ask of me?"

"One thing more."

"Let my brother explain himself as quickly as possible."

"I will do so. Men, without fear of the Great Spirit, have carried off Dona Clara, the daughter of the white chief whom my brother is pledged to save."

"Who are these men? Does my brother know them?"

"Yes, I know them only too well. They are bandits, at the head of whom is a monster called Red Cedar."

At this name the Indian started slightly, his eye flashed fire, and a deep wrinkle hollowed his forehead.

"Red Cedar is a ferocious jaguar," he said, with concentrated passion. "He has made himself the scourge of the Indians, whose scalps he desires. This

man has no pity either for women or children, but he possesses no courage; he only attacks his enemies in the dark, twenty against one, and when he is sure of meeting with no resistance."

"My brother knows this man. I see."

"And this man has carried off the white gazelle?"

"Yes."

"Good! My brother wishes to know what Red Cedar has done with his prisoner?"

"I do wish it."

The Indian rose.

"Time is slipping away," he said. "Unicorn will return to his friends. My brother the hunter need not feel alarmed: a chief is watching."

After uttering these words the chief went down into the cavern, mounted his horse, and disappeared in the direction of the desert.

Three weeks elapsed, however, ere Unicorn appeared to be effectually carrying out the plan he had explained to Valentine, who only learnt indirectly that a strong party of Comanche warriors had invaded the Mexican frontiers. Father Seraphin, though not yet completely cured, had insisted on proceeding to Santa Fé to take some steps to save Don Miguel, whose trial had gone on rapidly, and who was on the point of being executed. For his part, Don Pablo half mad with uneasiness, also insisted, in spite of Valentine's entreaties and remarks, on entering Santa Fé furtively, and trying to see his father.

"The night on which we found Valentine in the clearing, Unicorn visited him again for the first time: he came to inform him of the success of the measures he had taken. Valentine, used to Indian habits, understood half a word: hence he had not hesitated to announce to Don Pablo as a positive fact that his father would soon be free.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PRISON.

DON MIGUEL and General Ibanez had managed to be confined together by the expenditure of many entreaties and a heavy sum of gold. They inhabited two wretched rooms, the entire furniture of which consisted in a halting table, a few leather-covered butaccas, and two benches which served them as beds. These two men, so powerful by nature, had endured without complaint all the humiliation and insults inflicted on them during their trial, resolved to die as they had lived, with head erect and firm heart, without giving the judges who had condemned them the satisfaction of seeing them turn weak at the last moment.

It was toward the evening of the same day on which we saw Valentine in the clearing. Darkness fell rapidly, and the only window, a species of narrow slit that served to light the prison, allowed but a weak and dubious light to penetrate. Don Miguel was walking with long strides up and down his prison, while the general, carelessly reclining on one of the benches, quietly smoked his cigarette, watching with childish pleasure the light clouds of bluish smoke which rose in a spiral to the ceiling, and which he constantly blew asunder.

"Well," Don Miguel said all at once, "it seems it is not for to-day, either."

"No," the general said, "unless they wish to do us the honour of a torch-light execution."

"Can you at all account for this delay?"

"On my honour, no. I have ransacked my brains in vain to guess the reason."

Same with me. At first I fancied they were trying to frighten us by the continued apprehension of death constantly suspended over our heads."

"I am entirely of your opinion: still something extraordinary must be occurring."

"What makes you suppose that?"

"Why, for the last two days our worthy jailer. Tio Quesada, has become less brutal. I noticed that he has drawn in his claws, and attempted a grin."

"And you conclude from that?"

"Nothing positive," the general said. "Still I ask myself whence comes this incomprehensible change. It would be as absurd to attribute it to the pity he feels for our position as to suppose that the governor will come to ask our pardon for having tried and condemned us."

"Eh?" Don Miguel said with a toss of his head. "All is not over—we are not dead yet."

"Our life is in God's hands. He will dispose of it at His pleasure."

"Amen!" the general said, as he rolled a fresh cigarette.

"Do you not consider it extraordinary that, during the whole month we have been confined here, our friends have not given a sign of life?"

"Hum!" said the general, "a prisoner is very sick, and our friends doubtless feared to make us worse by the sight of their grief: that is why they have deprived themselves of the pleasure of visiting us."

"Do not jest, general. You accuse them wrongfully, I feel convinced."

"May heaven grant it! for my part I heartily forgive them their indifference."

"I cannot believe that Don Valentine, that true-hearted and noble-minded man, for whom I ever felt so deep a friendship, has not tried to see me."

"Bah! How, Don Miguel, can you, so near death as you are, still believe in honourable feelings in any man?"

At this moment there was a great clash of iron outside, and the door of the room was opened sufficiently to afford passage to the jailer, who preceded another person. The almost complete obscurity that prevailed in the prison prevented the condemned men from recognising the visitor, who wore a long black gown.

"Eh, eh!" the general muttered in his comrade's ear, "I believe that General Ventura, our amiable governor, has at length made up his mind."

"Why so?" Don Miguel asked in a low voice.

"Canarios! he has sent us a priest."

"On my word, all the better," Don Miguel could not refrain from saying.

In the meanwhile the jailer, a short, thick-set man, with a ferret face and cunning eye, had turned to the priest, whom he invited to enter, saying in a hoarse voice,—

"Here it is, senor padre; these are the condemned persons."

"Will you leave us alone, my friend?" the stranger said.

"Will you have my lantern? It is getting dark, and when people are talking they like to see one another."

"Thanks; you can do so. You will open when I call you by tapping at the door."

"All right—I will do so;" and he turned to the condemned, to whom he said savagely, "Well, senores, here is a priest. Take advantage of his services now you have got him. In your position there is no knowing what may happen from one moment to the other."

The prisoners shrugged their shoulders contemptuously, but made no reply. The jailer went out. When the sound of his footsteps had died away in the distance, the priest, who had till this moment stood with his body bent forward and his ear on the watch, drew himself up, and walked straight to Don Miguel.

"My father," the hacendero said in a firm voice, "I thank the person who sent you to prepare me for death, for I anxiously wished to fulfil my duties as a Christian. If you will proceed with me into the adjoining room I will confess my sins to you: they are those which an honest man only commits."

The priest took off his hat, seized the lantern, and placed it near his pale face.

"Father Seraphin!" the prisoners exclaimed with a surprise mingled with joy.

"Silence!" the priest ordered quickly. "Do not pronounce my name so loudly, brothers: every one is ignorant of my being here except the jailer."

"He!" Don Miguel said with stupor; "the man who has been insulting and humiliating us during a month!"

"That man is henceforth ours. Lose no time, come. I have secure means to get you out of prison, and to leave the town ere your evasion can be even suspected. Come, gentlemen, for the moments are precious."

The two prisoners interchanged a glance of sublime eloquence; then General Ibanez quietly seated himself on a butacca, while Don Miguel replied—

"Thanks, my father. You have undertaken the noble task of soothing all sorrow, and you do not wish to fail in your duty. Thanks for the offer you make us, which we cannot, however, accept. Men like us must not give our enemies right by flying like criminals. We fought for a sacred principle, and succumbed. We owe it to our countrymen and to ourselves to endure death bravely. Once again, thanks; but we will only quit this prison as free men, or walk to punishment."

"I have not the courage, gentlemen, to blame your heroic resolution: in a similar case I should act as you are doing. You have a very slight hope still left, so wait."

"We hope for nothing more, my father."

"That word is blasphemy in your mouth, Don Miguel. God can do all He wills. Hope, I tell you."

"I am wrong, father; forgive me."

"Now I am ready to hear your confession."

The prisoners bowed. Father Seraphin shrived them in turn, and gave them absolution.

"Hola!" the jailer shouted through the door. "Make haste; it is getting late. It will soon be impossible to leave the city."

"Open the door," the missionary said in a firm voice, and light me out of the prison. These caballeros refuse to profit by the chance of safety I came to offer them."

"They are mad," said the jailer.

And he went out, followed by the priest, who turned on the threshold and pointed to heaven. The prisoners remained alone.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE EMBASSY.

ON the selfsame day that Father Seraphin went to the prison to propose an escape to the condemned, a very strange circumstance aroused the entire population of Santa Fé. At about mid-day, at the moment when the inhabitants were enjoying their siesta, and the streets were completely deserted, a formidable hurrah, the terrible war-yell of the Comanche Indians, burst forth at the entrance of the town.

There was a general alarm, and everybody barricaded himself in his house believing in a sudden assault of the savages. Presently an immense clamour, and cries of distress and despair uttered by a terrified population, could be heard throughout the town.

In the meanwhile a few inhabitants, bolder than the rest, or having nothing to lose, proceeded with the greatest precautions toward the spot whence the shouts were heard; and a singular spectacle presented itself. A detachment of dismounted Comanche warriors, about two hundred strong was marching in close column, flanked on either wing by two troops, each of fifty horse. About twenty paces in front caracoled Unicorn.

All these men had a martial aspect which was really remarkable; all were strangely painted, well adorned, and in their full war costume. The horsemen were loaded with all sorts of arms and ornaments: they had a bow and quiver on their backs, their guns slung and decorated with their medicine bags, and their lances in their hands. They were crowned with magnificent black and white eagle feathers, with a falling tuft. The upper part of the body, otherwise naked, was covered by a coyote skin rolled up and worn across the shoulder; their bucklers were ornamented with feathers, cloth of different colours, and human scalps. They were seated on handsome saddle-cloths of panthers' skins, lined with red, which almost covered the horses' backs. According to the prairie fashion, they had no stirrups.

There was something at once imposing and striking in the appearance presented by this band of ferocious warriors as they advanced through the deserted streets of the city, brandishing their tremendous weapons, and uttering at intervals their sinister war-cry, which they accompanied by the shrill sound of long whistles made of human thigh-bones, which they wore suspended by strips of wild-beast hide.

By this time the Comanches had penetrated the heart of the city, driving before them, though without violence, the few inhabitants that had ventured to get in their way. They marched in good order, not turning to the right or left to plunder, and doing no reprehensible action.

The Comanches did not appear to notice the excitement they created. As soon as they were on the Plaza Mayor they halted and remained motionless, as if their feet had suddenly grown to the ground. Unicorn made a sign with his talisman; a warrior quitted the ranks, and rode up to the sentry standing in front of the governor's palace, who regarded the singular scene with a dazed air.

• Wah!" the Indian said sarcastically, "Is my brother asleep, that he does not hear a warrior addressing him?"

"I am not asleep," the soldier answered, as he fell back a pace. "What do you want?"

"The great sachem of the Comanches, the cacique whom the red children call Haboutzetlze, has come to speak to his great white father."

"What does he want with him?" the soldier asked.

"Is my brother a chief?" the Indian asked cunningly.

"No," the soldier answered.

"Well, then, let him close his ears as regards those the Great Spirit has set above him, and deliver the message I give him in the sachem's name."

While the Comanche warrior was exchanging these few words with the sentry, several persons, drawn out of the palace by the unusual disturbance they heard, mingled with the crowd. Among them were several officers, one of whom advanced to the Indian horseman.

"What does my brother want?" he asked him.

The warrior saw at the first glance that this time he had to do with a chief. He bowed courteously, and answered,—

"A deputation of the great Comanche nation desires to be introduced to my great white father."

"Good! But all the warriors cannot enter the palace," the officer said.

"My brother is right. Their chiefs alone will go in: their young men will await them here."

"Let my brother be patient. I will go and deliver his message in all haste."

"Good! My brother is a chief. The Spider will await him."

The new governor of Santa Fé was a general of the name of Don Benito Ventura. He was ignorant as a fish, stupid and haughty as a heathcock. Like the majority of his colleagues in this eccentric country, he had gained his general's epaulettes by repeated pronunciamientos, managing to gain a step by every revolution, while never having seen more fire than that of the thin husk *pajillo* he constantly had in his mouth. To sum him up, he was very rich, a wonderful coward, and more afraid of blows than aught in the world. Such he was morally: physically he was a plump little man, round as a barrel, with a rubicund face, lighted up by two small gray eyes, and had learned with the utmost terror the entrance of the Comanches into the town, and when the officer intrusted with the Spider's message presented himself before him, he had literally lost his head. It took all possible trouble to make him comprehend that the Indians came as friends, that they merely wished to have a palaver with him, and that since their coming their conduct had been most honourable and exemplary. Fortunately for the Spanish honour, other officers entered the apartment in which was the governor, attracted to the place by the news, which had spread with the speed of a train of powder through Santa Fé of the appearance of an Indian detachment.

When the general saw himself surrounded and supported by the officers of his staff his terror was slightly toned down, he regained his presence of mind, and it was with a calm and almost dignified demeanour that he discussed the question whether it was proper to receive the Indian deputation, and in what manner it should be done. The other officers, who, in the course of their professional career, had had many a skirmish with the red-skins, felt no inclination to anger them. They produced in support of their opinions such peremptory reasons, that General Ventura, convinced by their arguments, gave the officer who brought the message orders to bring the three principal Indian chiefs into the palace.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PRESENTATION.

It needed the thorough knowledge the Comanches possessed of the terror they inspired the Mexicans with for them to have dared to enter in so small a body a town like Santa Fé, where they might expect to find a considerable garrison.

The general officer sent by General Ventura had performed his duty. Unicorn and two other chiefs dismounted and followed him into the palace; while the Indian warriors, in spite of the heat of the sunbeams that played on their heads, remained motionless on the spot where their caciques bade them wait.

The general desired, by a certain display of strength, to impose on the red-skin deputies; but unfortunately, as is the constant rule in Mexico, the garrison, which on paper represented eight hundred men, was in reality only composed of sixty at the most. But if soldiers were lacking, to make up for it there was no paucity of officers. The thirty officers, attired in their splendid uniforms, that glistened with gold and decorations, were arranged round the general, while three posts of ten men each held the doors of the hall of reception.

When the preparations were completed the ambassadors were introduced. The Indian chiefs, accustomed for a long period to Spanish luxury, entered without testifying the slightest surprise. They bowed with dignity to the assembly, and, crossing their arms on their chests, waited till they were addressed. The general regarded them with an astonishment pardonable enough, for this was the first time he had found himself in the presence of these untameable red-skins.

"What reason can have been so powerful as to oblige my sons to come and see me?" he asked in a gracious and conciliating tone. "Let them make their request, and, if I can do so, I shall be most ready to satisfy it."

This opening, which the governor fancied to be very politic, was, on the contrary, most awkward, as it offended the pride of those he addressed, and whom he had the greatest interest in humouring. Unicorn took a step forward.

"I have heard a parrot speak. Are the words addressed to me?" he asked.

The general blushed up to the eyes at this insult, which he did not dare retaliate.

"The chief has not understood my words," he said. "My intentions are good."

The Comanches do not come here to ask a favour," Unicorn answered haughtily.

"What do my sons want, then?"

"To treat with my father for the ransom of the white chiefs who are in their power. Five pale-faces inhabit the cabin of the Comanches. The young men of the tribe demand their punishment, for the blood of the pale-faces is agreeable to the Master of Life. To-morrow the prisoners will have ceased to live if my father does not buy them off to-day."

After these words, uttered in a firm and peremptory tone, there was a moment of supreme silence.

"What does my father say? Shall we fasten our prisoners to the stake of blood, or restore them to liberty?"

"What ransom do you ask?" the general said.

"Listen, all you chiefs of the pale-faces here present, and judge of the clemency and generosity of the Comanches. We only wish for the life of these five men the life of two men."

"That is little, I allow," the general remarked; "and who are the two men whose lives you ask?"

"The pale-faces call them. the first, Don Miguel Zarate! the second General Ibanez."

The general started.

"Those two men cannot be delivered to you," he answered; "they are condemned to death."

"Good! My prisoners will be tortured this night," the chief replied stoically.

"Confound it!" the general sharply exclaimed, "is there no other arrangement possible?"

"I want those two men," the chief quickly interrupted. "If not my warriors will themselves deliver them; and in that case the Comanche chiefs cannot prevent the injury their warriors may commit in the town."

One of the officers present at the interview was aroused by the tone Unicorn had affected since the beginning of the audience. He was a brave old soldier, and the cowardice of his comrades shamed him. He rose at this point.

"Chief," he said in a firm voice, "your words are very haughty and foolish from the mouth of an ambassador. You are here at the head of scarce two hundred warriors, in the heart of a town peopled by brave men. Despite all my desire to be agreeable to you, if you do not pay greater respect to your audience, prompt and severe justice shall be inflicted on your insolence."

The Indian chief turned toward the new speaker, whose remarks had aroused a sympathetic murmur.

"My words are those of a man who tears nothing, and holds in his hands the lives of five men."

"Well," the officer retorted sharply, "what do we care for them? If they were such fools as to let you capture them, they must suffer the consequences of their madness."

"Good!" We will retire," Unicorn said haughtily. "Longer discourse is needless."

"A moment!" the general exclaimed. "All may be yet arranged. An affair like the present cannot be settled all in a hurry: we must reflect on the propositions made to us. My son is a chief, and will grant us reasonable time to offer him a reply."

"My father has spoken wisely," Unicorn presently made answer. "Tomorrow, at the twelfth hour, I will come for the final answer of the pale-faces, But my father will promise me not to order the punishment of the prisoners till he has told me the decision he has come to."

"Be it so," the general answered. "But what will the Comanches do till then?"

"They will leave the town as they entered it, and bivouac on the plain."

"Agreed on."

"The Master of Life has heard my father's promise. If he break his word, and possess a forked tongue, the blood shed will fall on his head."

The Comanche uttered these words with a significant tone that made the general tremble inwardly; then he bowed to the assembly, and left the hall with his companions.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PSYCHOLOGICAL.

ABOUT half a league to the west of Santa Fé three men and a woman were seated behind a dense clump of trees, which sheltered while rendering them unseen, over a *bois-de-vache* fire, supping with good appetite, and chatting together. The three men were Red Cedar's sons; the female was Ellen. The maiden was pale and sad: her dreamy eye wandered around with a distraught expression.

"Hum!" Sutter said, "what the deuce can keep the old one so long? He told us he should be back by four o'clock at the latest."

"Pshaw!" Nathan said with a shrug of his shoulders. "Are you afraid that something has happened to him? The old chap has beak and nails to defend himself; and since his last turn up with Don Miguel, the fellow who is to be shot to-morrow at Santa Fé, he has kept on his guard."

"I care very little," Sutter replied brusquely, "whether father is here or not; but I believe we should do well not to wait longer, but return to the camp."

"Nonsense! Our comrades can do without us," Shaw observed. "We are all right here, so suppose we stop the night. To-morrow it will be day. Well, if father has not returned by sunrise, we will go back to camp. Harry and Dick can keep good order till our return."

"In truth, Shaw is right," Nathan said. "Father is at times so strange, that he might be angry with us for not having waited for him."

"Let us stay, then," Sutter remarked carelessly. "I ask for nothing better. We shall only have to keep the fire up, and so one of us will watch while the others sleep."

"Agreed on," Nathan replied. "In that way, if the old man comes during our sleep, he will see that we waited for him."

The three brothers arose. Sutter and Nathan collected a pile of dry wood to maintain the fire, while Shaw intertwined a few branches to make his sister a sufficient shelter for the night. The two elder brothers thrust their feet toward the fire, wrapped themselves in their blankets, and went to sleep. Shaw, after stirring up the fire, threw himself at the foot of a larch tree, and letting his head sink on his chest, plunged into deep and painful meditation.

This poor boy, hardly twenty years of age, was a strange composite of good and evil qualities. Reared in the desert, he had grown up like one of its native trees, thrusting out here and there branches full of powerful sap. Nothing had ever thwarted his instincts, no matter what their nature might be. Possessing no cognizance of justice and injustice, he had never been able to appreciate the squatter's conduct, or see the injury he did society by the life he led.

Shaw, as we have said, was thinking. He was in love! He was dreaming of Dona Clara. He loved her, as he was capable of loving, with that passionate impetuosity, that violence of feeling, to which his uncultivated mind adapted him. The sight of the maiden caused him a strange trouble, which he did not attempt to account for. He was yielding to these crushing thoughts, when he suddenly felt a hand laid on his shoulder. On turning, Ellen stood before him, upright and motionless, like the white apparitions of the German legends.

"You are not asleep, Ellen?"

"No," she answered in a voice soft as a bird's song. "Brother, my heart is sad."

"What is the matter, Ellen? Why not enjoy a few hours of that repose so necessary for you?"

"My heart is sad, I tell you, brother," she went on. "In vain do I seek sleep—it flies far from me."

"Sister, tell me the cause of your sufferings, and perhaps I can appease the grief that devours you."

"Can you not guess it?"

"I do not understand you."

"On the contrary, you understand me too well, Shaw, she said with a sigh. "Your heart rejoices at this moment at the misfortune of the woman you should defend."

The young man blushed.

"What can I do?" he murmured faintly.

"Everything, if you have the firm will," she exclaimed energetically.

"No," Shaw went on; "the person of whom you speak is the old man's prisoner. I cannot contend against my father."

"You seek in vain to hide your thoughts from me," said Ellen harshly. "I read your heart as an open book: your sorrow is feigned, and you rejoice at the thought that in future you will be by Dona Clara's side."

"I!" he exclaimed with an angry start.

"Yes, you only see in her captivity a means to approach her."

"You are harsh to me, sister. Heaven is my witness that, were it possible, I would at once restore her the liberty torn from her."

"You do not because you will not, Shaw. Remember that women only love men in proportion to the sacrifices they make for them; they despise cowards."

"But how to save her?"

"That is your affair, Shaw."

"At least give me some advice which will help me to escape from the difficult position in which I find myself."

"In such serious circumstances your heart must guide you, and you must only ask counsel of it."

"But the old one?" Shaw said hesitatingly.

"Our father will not know your movements."

"Good!" the young man remarked, half convinced; "but I do not know where the maiden is hidden."

"I will tell you, if you swear to do all in your power to save her."

"I swear to obey you, Ellen. If I do not succeed in carrying the girl off, I will at any rate employ all my intellect to obtain that result."

"Dona Clara is confined at the Rancho del Coyote; she was entrusted to Andr s Garote. You will save her?"

"At all events I will try to free her from the hands of the man who guards her."

"Good!" the maiden remarked. "Lose no time: my father's absence alarms me. Perhaps at this moment he is preparing a safer hiding-place for his prisoner."

"Your idea is excellent, sister. Who knows whether it is not too late now to tear from the old man the prey he covets. I have not a moment to lose. If the old man returned I should be compelled to remain here. But who will keep watch while my brothers sleep?"

"I will," the maiden answered resolutely.

Rising hurriedly, he kissed his sister, threw his rifle over his shoulder, and ran off in the direction of Santa Fé. When he had disappeared in the gloom, and the sound of his footsteps had died out in the distance, the girl fell on the ground, muttering in a low, sad voice,

"Will he succeed?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

RED CEDAR did not remain long under the effect of the startling insult he had received. Pride, wrath, and, before all, the desire to avenge himself, restored his strength, and a few minutes after Don Pablo Zarate's departure the squatter had regained all his audacity.

"You see, *senor padre*," he said, addressing the monk, "that our little plans are known: we must, therefore, make haste if we do not wish to see persons break in here, from whom it is of the utmost importance to conceal ourselves. To-morrow night at the latest, perhaps before, we shall start. Do not stir from here till my return. Your face is too well known at Santa Fé for you to venture to show it."

"Hum!" the monk muttered, "that demon, whom I fancied dead, is a rude adversary. Fortunately we shall soon have nothing more to fear from his father, for I hardly know how we should get out of it."

"If the son has escaped us," Red Cedar said with an ugly smile, "that is fortunately not the case with the father."

"I wish it most earnestly, *canario*! for he is a determined man; but I confess to you that I shall not be entirely at my ease till I have seen him fall beneath the bullets of the soldiers."

"You will not have long to wait. General Ventura has ordered me to go and meet the regiment of dragoons he expects, in order to hurry them on, and bring them into the town this very night, if possible, when he will give the order for execution without delay."

"May Heaven grant it! But," he added with a sigh of regret, "what a pity that most of our scamps deserted us! We should have almost arrived at the *placer* by this time, and been safe from the vengeance of our enemies."

"Patience, *senor padre*: all is for the best, perhaps. Trust to me. *Andrés*, my horse."

"You will start at once, then?"

"Yes. I recommend you to watch carefully over our prisoner."

The monk shrugged his shoulders.

"Our affairs are tolerably well embarrassed already; then why burden ourselves with a woman?"

The squatter frowned.

"That is my business," he exclaimed in a peremptory tone. "Keep all stupid observations to yourself."

And mounting his horse, Red Cedar galloped out of Santa Fé.

"Hum!" *Andrés Garote* said as he watched him depart, "what a diabolical eye! Though I have known him several years, I never saw him like that before."

Without further remarks he arranged matters in the rancho, repairing as well as he could the disorder caused by the previous struggle; then he took a

look round him. The monk, with his elbows on the table and a cigarette in his mouth, was drinking the fluid left in the bottle.

"Why, *senor padre*," the *ranchero* said, "does not the time seem to you to go very slowly?"

"Extraordinarily so."

"If you like we could easily shorten it."

"In what way?"

"Oh, for instance, with these."

And *Andrès* drew from his boot a pack of greasy cards, which he complacently spread out on the table.

"Ah! that is a good idea," the monk exclaimed with sparkling eyes. "Let us have a game of *montè*."

"At your orders."

"Don *Andrès*, you are a most worthy gentleman. What shall we play for?"

"Ah, hang it! that is true; we must play for something," the *ranchero* said, scratching his head.

"The merest trifle, simply to render the game interesting."

"Yes, but to do that a man must possess the trifle."

"Do not let that trouble you. If you permit me I will make you a proposal."

"Do so, *senor*. You are a remarkably clever man, and can have none but bright ideas."

The monk bowed to this flattering insinuation.

"This is it: we will play, if you like, for the share of the gold we shall receive when we reach the *placer*."

"Done!" the *ranchero* shouted enthusiastically.

"Well," the monk said, drawing from his pocket a pack of cards no less dirty than the others, "we can at any rate kill time."

"What! you have cards too?" the *ranchero* remarked.

"Yes, and quite new, as you see."

Andrès bowed with an air of conviction, and the game began at once.

Although *Garote* was a passed master in trickery, and had displayed all his science, he found in the monk so skilful an adversary that, after more than three hours of an obstinate struggle, they both found themselves as little advanced as at the outset. The monk, however, on coming to the *ranch*, had an object which *Red Cedar* was far from suspecting.

Fray Ambrosio rested his arms on the table, bent his body slightly forward, and while carelessly playing with the cards, which he amused himself by sorting, he said to the *ranchero*, as he fixed a scrutinising glance upon him—

"Shall we talk a little, Don *Andrès*?"

"Willingly," the latter replied, who had partly risen, but now fell back on his chair.

By a secret foreboding *Andrès Garote* had guessed that the monk wished to make some important proposal to him.

"*Senor Don Andrès*," he said in a soft and insinuating voice, "what a happiness that your poor brother, on dying, revealed to me the secret of the rich *placer*, which he concealed even from yourself!"

"It is true," *Andrès* answered, turning slightly pale, "it was very fortunate, *senor padre*."

"Is it not so? for without it the immense fortune would have been lost to you and all else. Well, at this moment I have a horrible fear that we have deferred our departure too long, and that some of those European vagabonds we were speaking of just now may have discovered our *placer*. Those scoundrels have a peculiar scent for finding gold!"

"*Carai, senor padre!*" Andrès said, "that would drive me mad—an affair so well managed hitherto."

"That is true," Fray Ambrosio said in corroboration. "I could never console myself."

"*Demonios!* I have as great an interest in it as yourself, senor padre," the gambusino replied.

At these words Fray Ambrosio had incredible difficulty in repressing a smile.

"However," he said, after an instant's reflection, "supposing the placer is intact, and that no one has discovered it, we shall have a long journey to reach it."

"Yes," the gambusino remarked significantly; "the road is difficult and broadcast with perils innumerable."

"We must march with our chins on our shoulders, and finger on the rifle-trigger——"

"Fight nearly constantly with wild beasts or Indians——"

"In a word, do you not believe that the woman Red Cedar has carried off will prove a horrid bore?"

"Dreadfully so," Andrès made answer.

"What is to be done?"

"Hang it! that is difficult to say."

"Is she here?"

"Yes," the gambusino said, pointing to a door; "in that room."

"Suppose we restore her to her family?" said the monk.

"I have thought of that already."

"But who is to undertake this delicate mission?" asked the monk.

"I, *con mil demonios!*" the gambusino exclaimed, his eyes sparkling with greed.

"But if Red Cedar were to find out," the monk remarked, "that we had surrendered his prisoner?"

"Who will tell him?"

"I am sure I shan't."

"Do not let us lose time, then. You have a horse?"

"I have two."

"Bravo! You will place Dona Clara on one, and mount the other yourself."

"And go straight to the Hacienda de la Noria."

"That is it. Don Pablo will be delighted to recover his sister, whom he expected never to see again, and will not haggle over the price he pays for her deliverance."

"Famous! In that way we run no risk of not reaching the placer, as our party will only consist of men."

"Excellent reasoning!"

Andrès Garote rose with a smile which would have caused the monk to reflect, had he seen it; but at the same moment the latter was rubbing his hands, saying in a low voice, and with a most satisfied air—

"Now, my scamp, I've got you."

At this moment two vigorous blows were dealt on the door of the rancho, which had been carefully bolted after Red Cedar's departure. The two accomplices started.

"Must I open?" Andrès asked.

"Yes," the monk answered; "hesitation or refusal might create alarm."

The ranchero went to open the door, which the new-comer threatened to break in. A man walked in, who took a careful glance around, then doffed his hat, and bowed. The confederates exchanged a glance of vexation on recognizing him, for he was no other than Shaw, Red Cedar's youngest son.

"I am afraid I disturb you, gentlemen," the young man said, with an ironical smile

"Not at all," Andrès made answer; "on the contrary, we are delighted to see you."

"You are very late at Santa Fé," the monk remarked.

"It is true," the American said, with some embarrassment; "I am looking for my father, and fancied I should find him here."

"He was so a few hours back, but was obliged to leave us."

"Ah!"

This exclamation was rather drawn from the young man by the necessity he felt of replying, than through any interest he took in the information afforded him. He was evidently pre-occupied; but Fray Ambrosio did not appear to notice it, as he continued—

"Yes; it appears that his Excellency the Governor ordered your father to go and meet a regiment of dragoons intended to reinforce the garrison, and hasten its march."

"That is true; I forgot it."

The monk and the miner did not at all understand the American's conduct, and lost themselves in conjectures as to the reasons that brought him to the rancho.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A STORMY DISCUSSION.

SHAW was not timid, as we have said—he ought rather be accused of the opposite excess; he was not the man once his resolution was formed, to let anything soever turn him from it. His hesitation was not long; he suddenly rose, and violently stamping his rifle butt on the ground, looked at the two men, while saying in a firm voice—

"Be frank, my presence here at this hour astonishes you, and you ask yourselves what cause can have brought me."

"Sir," the monk said.

"Pardon me," Shaw exclaimed, interrupting him, "the cause you will seek in vain. I will tell you: I have come to deliver Dona Clara."

"Can it be possible?" the two men exclaimed.

"It is so; whether you like it or not, I care little. I am the man to hold my own against both of you, and no one can prevent me restoring the maiden to her father, as I have resolved on doing."

"What do I hear?" said Fray Ambrosio.

"Hum!" the young man continued quickly, "believe me, do not attempt any useless resistance."

"But we have not the slightest wish——"

"Take care," he interrupted him in a voice full of menace and frowning, "I will only leave the house accompanied by her I wish to save."

"Sir," the monk remarked, in an authoritative voice, "two words of explanation."

"Make haste!" he answered, "for I warn you that my patience is exhausted."

"I do not insist on your listening any length of time. You have come here, you say, with the intention of delivering Dona Clara?"

"Yes," he answered impatiently, "and if you attempt to oppose it——"

"Pardon me," the monk interrupted, "such a determination on your part naturally surprises us."

"Why so?" the young man said, raising his head haughtily.

"Because," Fray Ambrosio answered tranquilly, "you are the son of Red Cedar."

"Enough talking," Shaw exclaimed violently; "will you or not give me up her I have come to seek?"

"I must know, in the first place, what you intend doing with her."

"How does that concern you?"

"More than you imagine. Since that girl has been a prisoner, I constituted myself—if not her guardian, for the dress I wear forbids that—her defender; in that quality I have the right of knowing for what reason you, the son of the man who tore her from her family, have come to demand her surrender."

The young man had listened to these remarks with an impatience that became momentarily more visible. When the monk stopped, he looked at him for a moment with a strange expression, then, walked up so close as almost to touch him, drew a pair of pistols from his girdle and pointed them at the monk.

"Surrender Dona Clara to me," he said.

Fray Ambrosio had attentively followed all the American's movements, and when the latter put the pistol muzzles to his chest, the monk, with an action rapid as lightning, also drew two pistols from his girdle, and placed them on his adversary's chest. There was a moment of supreme expectation, of indescribable agony; the two men were motionless, face to face, panting, each with his fingers on a trigger, pale, and their brows dank with cold perspiration.

All at once the door of the rancho, which had not been fastened again after the squatter's entry, was violently thrown back and a man appeared; it was Father Seraphin. At a glance he judged the position, and boldly threw himself between the foemen, hurling them back, but not uttering a word. The two men recoiled, and lowered their weapons, but continued to menace each other with their glances.

"What!" the missionary said in a deep voice, "have I arrived just in time to prevent a double murder, gentlemen? In Heaven's name, hide those homicidal weapons."

"Withdraw, father; you have nothing to do here. Let me treat this man as he deserves," the squatter answered, "his life belongs to me."

"Young man," the priest replied, "the life of a fellow-being belongs only to God, who has the right to deprive him of it; lower your weapons—and you who dishonour the frock you wear, throw away those pistols which sully your hands—a minister of the altar should not employ other weapons than the Gospel."

The monk bowed, and caused his pistols to disappear, saying in a soft and cautious voice, "My father, I was compelled to defend my life which that maniac assailed. Heaven is my witness that I reprove these violent measures, too frequently employed in this unhappy country; but this man came into the house with threats on his lips; he insisted on our delivering a wretched girl whom this caballero," he said, pointing to the gambusino, "and myself did not think proper to surrender."

Andrès corroborated the monk's words.

"I wish to save that young girl from your hands," Shaw said, "and restore her to her father."

"Of whom are you speaking, my friend?" the missionary asked, with a secret beating of his heart.

"Of whom should I speak, save Dona Clara de Zarate, whom these villains retain here by force?"

"Can it be possible?" Father Seraphin exclaimed in amazement. "Dona Clara here?"

"Ask those men," Shaw answered roughly.

"Is it true?" the priest inquired.

"It is," the gambusino answered.

Father Seraphin frowned, and his pale forehead was covered with a febrile ruddiness.

"Sir," he said, in a voice choking with indignation, "I summon you, in the name of that God whom you serve, and whose minister you lay claim to being, to restore at once to liberty the hapless girl whom you have so unworthily imprisoned, in defiance of all laws, human and divine."

Fray Ambrosio bowed; he let his eyes fall, and said in a hypocritical voice—

"Father, you are mistaken as regards myself. I had nothing to do with the carrying off of that poor child, which, on the contrary, I opposed to the utmost of my power; and that is so true, father," he added, "that at the moment when this young madman arrived, the worthy gambusino and myself had resolved, at all risks, on restoring Dona Clara to her family."

"I should wish to believe you, sir; if I am mistaken, as you say, you will forgive me."

"You shall be satisfied, father," the monk replied. At a signal from him Garote left the room. During the few words interchanged between the two men, Shaw remained motionless, hesitating, not knowing what he ought to do; but he suddenly made up his mind, and turned to the missionary.

"Father," he said respectfully, "my presence is now needless here. Farewell; my departure will prove to you the purity of my intentions."

And turning suddenly on his heel, he hurried out of the rancho. A few moments after his departure the gambusino returned, Dona Clara following him.

Dona Clara no longer wore the dress of the whites, for Red Cedar, in order to render her unrecognizable, had compelled her to don the Indian garb, which the maiden wore with an innate grace that heightened its strange elegance. Like all Indian squaws, she was attired in two white chemises of striped calico—the one fastened round the neck, fell to the hips; while the other drawn in at the waist, descended to her ankles. Her neck was adorned with collars of fine pearls, mingled with those small shells called wampum, and employed by the Indians as money. Her arms and ankles were surrounded by wide circles of gold, and a small diadem of the same metal relieved the pale tint of her forehead. Mocassins of deer-hide, embroidered with wool and beads, of every colour, imprisoned her small and high-arched feet.

As she entered the room, a shadow of melancholy and sadness spread over her face, adding, were that possible, a further charm to her person. On seeing the missionary, Dona Clara uttered a cry of joy, and rushing towards him fell into his arms, and murmured in a heart-rending voice—

"Father! save me! save me!"

"Be calm, my daughter!" the priest said to her, gently. "You have nothing more to fear."

"Come!" she exclaimed, wildly, "let us fly from this accursed house."

"Yes, my daughter," we will go; set your mind at rest."

"You see, father," Fray Ambrosio said, hypocritically, "that I did not deceive you."

The missionary cast at the monk a glance of undefinable meaning.

"I trust that you spoke truly," he replied; "the God who gauges hearts will judge you according to works. I will rescue this maiden at once."

"Do so, father; I am happy to know her under your protection."

And picking up the cloak which Don Pablo left after blinding Red Cedar, he

placed it delicately on the shuddering shoulders of Dona Clara, in order to conceal her Indian garb. Father Seraphin drew her arm through his own, and led her from the rancho. Ere long they disappeared in the darkness.

"Well," said Andrès Garote, "what do you think, senor padre, of all that has happened?"

"Perhaps things are better as they are."

"And Red Cedar?"

"I undertake to render ourselves as white in his sight as the snows in the Caffre de Perote."

"Hum! it will be difficult."

"Perhaps so."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MYSTERY.

On leaving the Rancho del Coyote, Red Cedar dug his spurs into his horse's flanks, and galloped in a south-western direction. Throwing suspicious glances on either side, he went on thus for about three-quarters of an hour, when he reached a house, in one of the windows of which burned three wax-tapers.

The lights thus arranged were evidently a signal for the squatter, for so soon as he came to the house he stopped and dismounted, attached his horse to a larch-tree, and prudently concealing himself behind a thicket, imitated thrice at equal intervals the hu-hu of an owl. The lights burning in the window were extinguished, as if by enchantment. At this moment a voice could be heard from the house. Red Cedar was watching so carefully. The squatter listened; the speaker leaned for a second out of a window, looked cautiously round, and disappeared muttering loud enough for the American to overhear—

"All is quiet in the neighbourhood."

"Still," the squatter said, without showing himself, "the coyotes prowl about the plain."

"Are you coming or going?" the man at the window continued.

"Both," the squatter answered, still hidden behind his bush.

"You can come on, for you are expected."

"I know it; hence here I am."

While making this answer, the squatter left his hiding-place, and placed himself before the door with folded arms, like a man who has nothing to fear. The door was cautiously opened; a man emerged, carefully wrapped up in a wide cloak, which only allowed eyes to be seen, that flashed in the gloom like a jackal's. This person walked straight up to Red Cedar.

"Well," he asked, in a low voice, "have you reflected?"

"Yes, and I refuse; because I am growing tired of constantly taking in my nets game by which others profit, and which I ought to keep as a safeguard."

"You call this girl a guarantee?"

"By heaven! what else do you mean to make of her?"

"Do not compare me with you, scoundrel!"

"What is the difference between us? I am a scoundrel, I grant; but, by heaven, you are another, my master, however powerful you may be."

"Listen, caballero!" the stranger answered in a cutting voice. "I will lose

no more of my time in discoursing with you. I want that girl, and will have her, whatever you may do to prevent me."

"Good; in that case you declare war against me?" the squatter said with a certain tinge of alarm.

The stranger shrugged his shoulders.

"We have known one another long enough to be perfectly well acquainted we can only be friends or foes. Is not that your opinion?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, hand Dona Clara over to me, and I will give you the papers which——"

"Enough!" the squatter said sharply. "Have you those papers about you?"

The stranger burst into a laugh.

"Do you take me for such a fool?" he said. "No, I have not those papers about me. I am not such an ass as to risk assassination at your hands."

"What would your death profit me?"

"Hang it all, if it were only my scalp you would be sure to receive at least fifty dollars for it."

At this mournful jest the squatter began laughing.

"I did not think of that," he said, gaily.

"In a month from to-day, hour for hour, day for day, wherever you may be, I shall present myself to you."

"For what purpose?" the squatter asked.

"To repeat my demand with reference to the prisoner."

"Then, as now, I shall reply, 'No my master.'"

"Perhaps so. Live and learn. Now, good-bye, and may the deuce, your patron saint, preserve you in good health until our next meeting."

"Good, good! threats do not frighten me. *Demonios*, since I have been traversing the desert, I have found myself opposed to enemies quite as dangerous as you."

"That is possible, Red Cedar; but believe me, meditate carefully on my words."

"Hum! Well, then, listen in your turn. In the desert every man armed with a good rifle has nothing to fear from whomsoever. Well, my rifle is excellent, I have a sure aim, and I say no more."

"Nonsense. What next?" the stranger interrupted him. "You are mad! I defy you."

"Hang it, though, what can be your motive for wishing to have this girl in your power?"

"That is no affair of yours."

"You shall not have her."

"We shall see. Good-bye, Red Cedar."

"Good-bye, Don Melchior, or whatever be the name you please to bear."

The stranger made no reply, but turned his head with a gesture of contempt, and whistled. A man emerged from the house, holding a horse by the bridle; at one bound the stranger reached the saddle, and ordered the servant to withdraw. And loosing his rein, the stranger started at a gallop, not condescending even to turn his head. Red Cedar looked after him with an indescribable expression of rage.

"Oh," he muttered in a low voice, "demon! shall I never free myself from your clutches!"

And with a motion rapid as thought he shouldered his rifle. All at once the latter turned his horse, and stood right opposite Red Cedar.

"Mind not to miss me!" he cried, with a burst of laughter that caused a cold perspiration to bead on the bandit's forehead.

The latter let his rifle fall, saying in a hollow voice, "He is right, and I am mad! If I only had the papers!"

The stranger waited for a moment calm and motionless; then he started again, and soon disappeared in the darkness. Red Cedar stood with his body bowed forward, and his ears on the watch, so long as the horse's hoofs could be heard; then he returned to his own steed, and bounded into the saddle."

"Now to go and warn the dragoons," he said.

The squatter had scarce departed ere several men appeared from either side; they were Valentine, Curumilla, and Don Pablo on the right. Unicorn and Eagle-wing on the left. Valentine and his friends were astonished at meeting the Comanche chief, whom they believed gone back to his camp; but the sachem explained to them, in a few words, how, at the moment he was crossing the spot where they now were, he had heard Red Cedar's voice, and concealed himself in the shrubs in order to overhear the squatter's colloquy with his strange friend.

"'Tis strange," Valentine remarked, as he passed his hand several times across his forehead. "I do not know where I have seen the man just now talking here with Red Cedar, but I have a vague reminiscence of having met him before."

"What shall we do?" Don Pablo asked.

"Hang it, what we agreed on;" and turning to the chief, he said "Good luck, brother, I believe we shall save our friend."

"I am sure of it," the Indian replied, laconically.

"May heaven hear you, brother," Valentine continued. "Act! while on your side, you watch the town for fear of treason. We then will ambush ourselves on the road the gambusinos must take, in order to know positively the direction in which they are proceeding. Till to-morrow, chief!"

"Stop!" a panting voice exclaimed, and a man suddenly appeared in the midst of them.

"Father Seraphin!" Valentine said in surprise. "What chance brings you this way?"

"I was looking for you."

"Speak! speak quickly, father! Has Don Miguel left his prison?"

"Alas! not yet; but his daughter is free!"

"Dona Clara free!" Valentine shouted joyously. "Heaven be blessed! where is she?"

"She is temporarily in safety, be assured of that; but let me give you a warning, which may perhaps prove useful to you."

"Speak! speak!"

"By order of the governor, Red Cedar has gone to meet the regiment of dragoons, coming up to reinforce the Santa Fé garrison."

"*Caramba*," Valentine said, "are you sure of your statement, father?"

"I am; in my presence, the men who carried off Dona Clara spoke about it."

"All is lost if these soldiers arrive."

"Yes," the missionary said; "but, how to prevent it?"

Curumilla lightly touched the leader's arm.

"What do you want, chief?"

"The Comanches are warriors," Curumilla answered.

"Ah!" Valentine exclaimed, and tapping his forehead with delight, "that is true, chief; you save us."

Curumilla smiled with pleasure.

"While you go in pursuit of the soldiers," said Don Pablo, "as I can be of

no service to you, I will accompany Father Seraphin to my poor sister, whom I have not seen so long, and am eager to embrace."

"Do so," Valentine answered. "At daybreak you will bring Dona Clara to the camp, that I may myself deliver her to her father."

"That is agreed."

Valentine, Curumilla, and Unicorn rushed out in the plain, while Father Seraphin and Don Pablo returned to the town. The two gentlemen, anxious to join the girl, did not perceive that they were closely watched by an individual who followed their every movement, while careful not to be seen by them. It was Nathan, Red Cedar's eldest son.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE AMBUSCADE.

THE night-breeze had swept the clouds away; the sky, of a deep azure, was studded with an infinity of stars; the night was limpid, the atmosphere so transparent as to allow the slightest varieties of the landscape to be distinguished. About four leagues from Santa Fé, a numerous band of horsemen was following a path scarce traced in the tall grass, which approached the town with countless turns and windings. These horsemen, who marched in rather decent order, formed the regiment of dragoons so anxiously expected by General Ventura.

About ten paces ahead rode four or five officers gaily chatting together, among whom was the colonel. The regiment continued its march slowly, advancing cautiously, through fear of losing its way in a perfectly strange country. The colonel and his officers who had always fought in the States bordering the Atlantic, found themselves now for the first time in these savage countries.

"Caballeros," the colonel suddenly remarked, "I confess to you that I am completely ignorant as to our whereabouts. Can any one of you throw a light on the subject? This road is fearful, it seems to lead nowhere, and I am afraid we have lost our way."

"We are all as ignorant as yourself on that head, colonel," an officer answered.

"On my word!" the colonel went on, taking a glance of satisfaction around, "we are not in a hurry to reach Santa Fé. I suppose it makes little difference whether we get there to-day or to-morrow. I believe that the best thing for us to do is to bivouac here for the rest of the night; at sunrise we will start again."

"You are right, colonel," the officer said, whom he seemed to address most particularly, "a few hours' delay is of no consequence."

"Give the order to halt."

The officer immediately obeyed; the soldiers, wearied with a long night's march, greeted with shouts of joy the order to stop. They dismounted. The horses were unsaddled and picketted, camp fires were lighted, in less than an hour the bivouac was arranged.

The colonel, in desiring to camp for the night, had a more serious fear than that of losing his way; it was that of falling in with a party of *Indios bravos*. The colonel was brave, and had proved it on many occasions; grown gray in harness, he was an old soldier who feared nothing in the world particularly; but

accustomed to warfare in the interior of the Republic, having never had opposed to him any but nearly civilised foes, he professed for the Indians that instinctive fear which all the Mexicans entertain, and he would not risk a fight with an Apache or Comanche war party in the middle of the night, in a country whose resources he did not know, and run the risk of having his regiment cut to pieces by such Protean enemies. On the other hand, he was unaware that the governor of Santa Fé had such pressing need of his presence, and this authorised him in acting with the utmost precaution. Still, so soon as the bivouac was established, and the sentries posted, the colonel sent off a dozen resolute men under an Alferez, to trot up the country and try to procure a guide.

The little squad of troopers sent out to beat up the country had started at a gallop, but it soon reduced its pace, caring little for the important mission with which they were intrusted. The moon rose on the horizon, shedding her fantastic rays over the ground. A majestic silence hovered over the plain, only disturbed at intervals by those sounds, without any known cause, which are heard on the Savannahs, and which seem to be the respiration of the sleeping world. Suddenly the mocking-bird sung twice, and its plaintive and soft song resounded melodiously through the air.

"Hallo," one of the dragoons said, addressing his comrade, "that's a bird that sings very late."

"An evil omen," the other said.

"*Canarios!* what omen are you talking about, comrade?"

"I have always heard say," the second speaker remarked sententiously, "that when you hear a bird sing on your left at night it predicts misfortune."

"The deuce confound you and your prognostics."

At this moment the song, which appeared previously some distance off, could be heard much more close, and seemed to come from some trees on the sides of the path the dragoons were following. The Alferez raised his head and stopped, as if mechanically trying to explain the sound that smote his ears; but all became silent again, so he shook his head and continued his conversation. The detachment had been out more than an hour. The Alferez was about to give orders to return to camp when one of the troopers pointed out to him some heavy, black forms, apparently prowling about unsuspectingly.

"What on earth can that be?" the officer asked.

"*Caspita!*" one of the dragoons exclaimed, "that is easy to see; they are browsing deer!"

"Deer!" said the Alferez, in whom the hunter's instinct was suddenly aroused, "there are at least thirty; suppose we try to catch some."

"It is difficult."

"Pshaw!" another soldier shouted, "it is light enough for each of us to send them a bullet."

"You must by no means use your carbines," the Alferez interposed sharply; "if our shots re-echoed through the mountains, and caught the ears of the Indians, we should be ruined."

"What is to be done, then?"

"Lasso them, *caspita*, as you wish to try and catch them."

"That is true; I did not think of that."

The dragoons, delighted at the opportunity of indulging in their favourite sport, dismounted, fastened their horses to the road-side trees, and seized their lassos. They then advanced cautiously toward the deer, which continued grazing tranquilly, without appearing to suspect that enemies were so near them. On arriving at a short distance from the game, the dragoons separated

in order to have room for whirling their lassos, and making a covering of each tree, they managed to approach within fifteen paces of the animals. Then they stopped, exchanged glances, carefully calculated the distance, and, at a signal from their leader, sent their lassos whizzing through the air.

A strange thing happened at this moment, however. All the deer-hides fell simultaneously to the ground, displaying Valentine, Curumilla, and a dozen Comanche warriors, who, profiting by the stupor of the troopers at their extraordinary metamorphosis hunted the hunters by throwing lassos over their shoulders and hurled them to the ground. The ten dragoons and their leader were prisoners.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A FRIENDLY DISCUSSION.

AFTER leaving his enemy (for the mysterious man with whom he had so stormy a discussion could be nothing else), Red Cedar set out to join the regiment, and hasten its arrival according to the orders he had received. In spite of himself the squatter was suffering from extraordinary nervousness, and involuntarily he went over the various points of the conversation with the person who took such such precautions in communicating with him. The threats he had proffered recurred to his mind. It appeared as if the bandit, who feared nothing in the world, had good reasons, however, for trembling in the presence of the man who, for more than an hour had crushed him with his irony. What reason could be so powerful as to produce so startling a change in this indomitable being? No one could have said; for the squatter was master of his secret, and would have mercilessly killed anybody he suspected of having read even a portion of it.

The reason was, at any rate, very powerful; for after a few minutes of deep thought, his hand let go the reins and his head fell on his breast; the horse, no longer feeling the curb, stopped, and began nibbling the young tree shoots. The squatter did not notice this halt; he was thinking, and hoarse exclamations now and then came from his chest, like the growling of a wild beast. At length he raised his head.

"No!" he shouted, as he directed a savage glance at the starlit sky, "any struggle with that demon is impossible. I must fly, so soon as possible, to the prairies of the Far West. I will leave this implacable foe; I will fly from him, as the lion does, carrying off my prey in my claws."

After having uttered these words in a low voice, in the fashion of men wont to live in solitude, Red Cedar appeared to regain all his boldness and energy. He looked savagely around, and, burying his spurs in his horse's flanks, he started with the speed of an arrow in the direction of the rancho, which he had left but a few hours previously, and where his two accomplices still remained.

The monk and the gambusino, delighted at the unforeseen termination of the scene we recently narrated, delighted above all at having got rid of Dona Clara without being immediately mixed up in her escape, tranquilly resumed their game of *monté*, and played with that mental satisfaction produced by the certainty of having nothing to reproach themselves with, disputing with the utmost obstinacy for the few reals they still happened to have in their pockets. In the midst of a most interesting game they heard the furious gallop of a horse up the paved street. Instinctively they stopped and listened; a secret fore-

boding seemed to warn them that this horse was coming to the rancho, and that its rider wanted them.

The horse stopped short before the rancho; a man dismounted, and the door shook beneath the tremendous blows of his fists.

"Hum!" the gambusino whispered, as he blew out the solitary candle that illumined the room. "Who the deuce can come at this advanced hour of the night? I have a great mind not to open."

Strange to say Fray Ambrosio had apparently regained all his serenity. With a smiling face, crossed arms, and back leaned against the wall, he seemed to be a perfect stranger to what perplexed his mate so furiously. At Garote's remark an ironical smile played round his pale lips for a second.

"You are at liberty to act as you please, gossip; still I think it my duty to warn you of one thing."

"What is it?"

"That, if you do not open your door, the man, whoever he may be, now battering it, is very capable of breaking it in."

"You speak very much at your ease, *senor padre*," the gambusino answered; "suppose it be Red Cedar?"

"The greater reason to open the door. If you hesitate, he will begin to suspect you; and then take care, for he is a man capable of killing you like a dog."

"That is possible; but do you think that, in such a case, you will escape with clean hands?"

"Will you open *demonios*?" a rough voice shouted.

"Red Cedar!" both men whispered.

"I am coming," Andrès replied in a voice which terror caused to tremble.

He rose unwillingly, and walked slowly towards the door.

"A little patience, *caballero*," the gambusino said, in that honeyed voice peculiar to Mexicans when they meditate some roguery. "Coming, coming."

And he began unbarring the door.

"Make haste!" the squatter howled.

"Hum! it is surely he!" the gambusino thought. "Who are you?" he asked.

"What! who am I?" Red Cedar exclaimed, bounding with wrath. "Did you not recognise me, or are you having a game with me?"

"I never have a game with anyone," Andrès replied unperturbably: but I warn you that, although I fancy I recognise your voice, I shall not open till you mention your name."

"I will break the door down."

"Try it," the gambusino shouted, "and by our Lady of Pilar I will send a bullet through your head."

At this threat the squatter rushed against the door in incredible fury, with the evident intention of breaking it in; but, contrary to his expectations, though it creaked and groaned on its hinges, it did not give way. Andrès Garote had indulged in a line of reasoning which was far from being illogical, and revealed a profound knowledge of the human heart. He had said to himself, that, as he must face Red Cedar's anger, it would be better to let it reach its paroxysm at once, so as to have only the decreasing period to endure.

"Well, then," the other said furiously, "I am Red Cedar. Do you recognise me now?"

"Of course; I see that I can open without danger to your excellency."

And the gambusino hurriedly drew back the bolts. Red Cedar rushed into the room with a yell of fury, but Andrès had put out the light.

"Hallo!" said the squatter. "What is the meaning of this darkness? I can see nothing."

"*Caspita!*" Andrès replied, impudently, "do you think I amuse myself o' nights by watching the moon? I was asleep, compadre."

"That is possible," the squatter remarked; "but that was no reason for keeping me so long."

"Prudence is the mother of security. We must not let every comer enter the rancho."

"Certainly not; I approve of that. Still you must have recognised my voice."

"True. Still I might be mistaken. It is difficult to know anyone through the thickness of a door."

"Very good, then," Red Cedar said, as if tired of combating arguments which did not convince him. "And where is Fray Ambrasio?"

"Here, I suppose; possibly asleep."

"After the row I made, that is highly improbable."

"Hang it, he may be a hard sleeper."

"Hum!" the squatter snorted suspiciously; "light the candle."

Andrès struck a match, and Red Cedar looked eagerly round the room; but Fray Ambrosio had disappeared.

"Where is the monk?" the American asked.

"I do not know; probably gone."

The squatter shook his head.

"All this is not clear," he muttered; "there is treachery behind it."

"That is possible," the gambusino answered calmly.

Red Cedar bent on Andrès eyes that flashed with fury, and roughly seized him by the throat.

"Answer, scoundrel!" he shouted. "What has become of Dona Clara?"

"Let me loose," he panted, "you are choking me."

"Where is Dona Clara?"

The squatter squeezed more tightly.

"Aie!" Andrès whined, "I tell you I do not know."

"Malediction!" Red Cedar went on. "I will kill you, picaro, if you are obstinate."

"Let that man go, and I will tell you all you wish to know," was said in a firm voice by a hunter, who at this moment appeared on the threshold.

The two men turned in amazement.

"Nathan!" Red Cedar shouted on recognising his son. "What are you doing here?"

"I will tell you, father," the young man said.

CHAPTER XXXII.

NATHAN.

NATHAN was not asleep, as Ellen supposed, when she urged on Shaw to devote himself to liberate Dona Clara, and he had listened attentively to the conversation. Nathan was a man of about thirty years of age, who, both physically and morally, bore a marked resemblance to his father. Hence the old squatter had concentrated in him all the affection which his uncultivated and savage nature was capable of feeling. Since the fatal night, when the chief of the Coras had avenged himself for the burning of his village and the murder of its inhabitants, Nathan's character had grown still

more gloomy; a dull and deep hatred boiled in his heart against the whole human race; he only dreamed of assassination; he had sworn in his heart to revenge on all those who fell into his hands the injury one man had inflicted on him; in a word, Nathan loved none and hated everything.

When Shaw had disappeared among the bushes, and Ellen, after taking a final glance around to convince herself that all was in order, re-entered the hut that served her as a shelter, Nathan rose cautiously, threw his rifle over his shoulder, and rushed after his brother. Another reason urged him to foil Shaw and Ellen's plans; he had a double grudge against Don Miguel—the first for the stab the Mexican gentleman had given his father; the second because Don Miguel had compelled him to leave the forest in which his family had so daringly installed itself.

Nathan did not lose a moment, but reached Santa Fé by the most direct route. Presently he reached an isolated house, not far from which several men were conversing together in a low voice. Nathan stopped and listened; but he was too far off, and could distinguish nothing. The squatter's son, reared in the desert, was thoroughly versed in all its stratagems; with the piercing eye of a man accustomed to night journeys on the prairie, he recognised well-known persons, and his mind was at once made up.

He laid himself on the ground, and following the shadow cast by the moon, lest he might be perceived by the speakers, he advanced, inch by inch, crawling like a serpent, stopping at intervals, employing all the precautions usual under such circumstances. At length he reached a clump of Peru trees only a few yards distant from the spot where the men he wished to overhear were standing. He then got up, leaned against the largest tree, and prepared to listen. His expectations were not deceived; though a few words escaped him here and there, he was near enough perfectly to catch the sense of the conference. This conversation was, in truth, most interesting to him; a sinister smile lit up his face, and he eagerly clenched the barrel of his rifle.

Presently the party broke into two. Valentine, Curumilla, and Unicorn, took the road leading to the open country, while Don Pablo and Father Seraphin returned toward the town. Valentine and his two friends almost touched the young man as they passed, and he instinctively carried his hand to his pistols; they even stopped for a moment and cast suspicious glances at the clump that concealed their foe. While conversing in whispers, Unicorn drew a few branches aside and peered in; for some seconds Nathan felt an indescribable agony. Unicorn carelessly let the leafy curtain fall again, saying only one word to his comrades—

"Nothing."

The latter resumed their march.

"I do not know why," said Valentine, "but I fancy there is some one hidden there."

"No," the chief answered, "there is nobody."

So soon as he was alone, Nathan drew two or three deep breaths, and started in pursuit of Don Pablo and the missionary, whom he soon caught up. As they did not suppose they were followed, they were conversing freely together.

Don Pablo and his companion walked quickly, like persons anxious to reach a place where they know they are expected, exchanging but a few words at intervals, whose meaning, however, caught up by the man who followed them, urged him still more not to let them out of sight. They thus traversed the greater part of the town, and on reaching the *Callé de la Merced*, they stopped at a house of handsome aspect.

A weak light burned at the window of a ground-floor room. By an instinctive movement, the two gentlemen turned round at the moment of entering

the house; but Nathan had slipped into a doorway, and they did not perceive him. Father Seraphin tapped gently; the door was at once opened, and they went in.

"Good!" the young man muttered; "but how to warn the old one that the dove is in her nest?"

All at once, a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and Nathan turned, fiercely clutching a bowie-knife. A man was before him, gloomy, silent, and wrapped in the thick folds of his cloak. The American started.

"Go your way," he said, in a menacing voice.

"What are you doing here?" the stranger asked.

"How does that concern you? The street is free to all."

"No."

This word was pronounced with a sharp accent. Nathan tried in vain to scan the features of the man with whom he had to deal.

"Give way," he said, "or blood will surely be shed between us."

As sole reply, the stranger took a pistol in his right hand, a knife in his left.

"Ah!" Nathan said, mockingly, "you mean fighting."

"For the last time, withdraw!"

"Nonsense, you are mad, *senor caballero*; the road belongs to all, I tell you."

"I wish to be alone here."

"You mean to kill me, then?"

"If I must, yes, without hesitation."

The two speakers had exchanged these words in a low and hurried voice, in less time than we have employed to write them. Nathan returned his pistol to his belt.

"No noise," he said; "the knife will do; besides, we are in a country where that is the only weapon in use."

"Be it so," the stranger replied; "you will not give way to me? Then your blood will be on your own head."

"Or on yours."

The two foemen each fell back a pace, and stood on guard, with their cloaks rolled round their left arms. The moon, veiled by clouds, shed no light; the darkness was perfect; midnight struck from the cathedral; the voice of the *serenos* chanting the hour could be heard in the distance, announcing that all was quiet. There was a moment's hesitation, which the enemies employed in scrutinizing each other. Suddenly Nathan uttered a hoarse yell, rushed on his enemy, and threw his cloak in his face, to put him off his guard. The stranger parried the stroke dealt him, and replied by another, guarded off with equal dexterity. The two men then seized each other round the waist, and wrestled for some minutes, without uttering a word; at length the stranger rolled on the ground with a heavy sigh; Nathan's knife was buried in his chest. The American rose with a yell of triumph—his enemy was motionless.

"Can I have killed him?" Nathan muttered.

All at once he started back, for he had recognised his brother Shaw.

"What is to be done now?" he said; but then added carelessly, "Pshaw! all the worse for him. Why did he come across my path?"

Shaw lay to all appearance dead, with pale and drawn cheeks, in the centre of the street.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE WOUNDED MAN.

NATHAN proceeded straight to the Rancho del Coyote, where his unexpected arrival was a blessing for Andrès Garote, whom the old squatter was treating very roughly. On hearing his son's words, Red Cedar let go.

"Well," he asked, "where is Dona Clara?"

"Come with me, father," the young man answered; "I will lead you to her."

"You know her hiding-place, then?"

"Yes."

"And so do I," Fray Ambrosio shouted, as he rushed into the room with discomposed features; "I felt sure I should discover her."

Red Cedar looked at him with amazement.

"What has happened to her?" the squatter said presently.

"A very simple matter," Fray Ambrosio answered, with an inimitably truthful accent; "about two hours back your son Shaw came here."

"Shaw!" the squatter exclaimed.

"Yes, the youngest of your sons."

"Go on."

"Very good. He presented himself to us as coming from you to remove our prisoner."

"And what did you do?" the squatter asked.

"What could we do?"

"Why, oppose the girl's departure."

"*Caspita!* do you fancy we let her go so?" the monk asked, imperturbably.

"Come," said the squatter, "how did all this finish?"

"Thanks to an ally who came to your son's help, and to whom we were obliged to bow——"

"An ally! What man can be so bold as to dare——"

"Eh!" the monk sharply interrupted Red Cedar, "that man is a priest."

"You are jesting, *senor padre*," the squatter exclaimed, savagely.

"Not the least in the world. I should have resisted; but I belong to the Church; and, as Father Seraphin is my superior, I was forced to obey him."

"What!" the squatter said, with a groan, "is he not dead?"

"It appears," the monk remarked, ironically, "as if those you kill are all in a good state of health."

At this allusion to Don Pablo's death, the squatter stifled a cry of anger, and clenched his fists.

"Good!" he said; "where is Dona Clara at this moment?"

"In a house no great distance from here," Nathan answered.

An ill-omened smile momentarily lit up the old bandit's features.

"Good!" he said; "as the dove is in her nest, we shall be able to find her. What o'clock is it?"

"Three in the morning," Andrès interjected. "Day will soon break."

"We must make haste, then. Follow me, all of you." Then he added, "But what has become of Shaw? Does any one of you know?"

"You will probably find him at the door of Dona Clara's house," Nathan said, in a hollow voice.

"How so? Has my son entered into a compact with my enemies?"

"Yes; as he arranged with them to carry off your prisoner."

"Oh! I will kill him if he prove a traitor!" the squatter shouted.

Nathan fell back two steps, drew his knife from his boot, and showed it to his father.

"That is done," he said, harshly. "Shaw tried to stab me, so I killed him."

After these mournful words, there was a moment of silence in the rancho. All these men, though their hearts were steeled by crime, shuddered involuntarily. The squatter passed his hard hand over his dank brow. A sigh, like a howl, painfully forced its way from his oppressed chest.

"He was my last born," he said, in a voice broken by emotion. "He deserved death, but not to have received it at his brother's hands."

"Father!" Nathan muttered.

"Silence!" Red Cedar shouted, in a hollow voice, as he stamped his foot passionately on the ground; "what is done cannot be undone; but, woe to my enemy's family!"

He approached a table, seized a bottle half full of mezcal that stood on it, and emptied it at a draught. When he had finished drinking, he threw down the bottle which broke with a crash, and said to his mates, in a hollow voice—

"Let us be off! We have wasted too much time here already."

And he rushed out of the rancho, the others following close at his heels.

In the meanwhile, Don Pablo and Father Seraphin were in the house. The priest had taken the maiden to the house of an honest family which owed him great obligations, and was too happy to receive the poor sufferer. The missionary did not intend, however, to let her be long a burthen to these worthy people. At daybreak he intended to deliver her to certain relations of her father, who inhabited a hacienda a few leagues from Santa Fé.

Dona Clara had been placed in a comfortable room by her hosts. Their first care had been to make her doff the Indian robes for others more suitable to her birth and position. The maiden, worn out by the poignant emotions of the scene she had witnessed, was on the point of retiring to bed, when Father Seraphin and Don Pablo tapped at the door of her room. She hastily opened it, and the sight of her brother, whom she had not hoped to see so speedily, overwhelmed her with joy.

An hour soon slipped away in pleasant chat. Don Pablo was careful not to tell his sister of the misfortune that had befallen their father; for he did not wish to dull by that confession the joy the poor girl promised herself for the morrow. Then, as the night was advancing, the two men withdrew, so as to allow her to enjoy that rest so needed to strengthen her for the long journey to the hacienda, promising to come and fetch her in a few hours. Father Seraphin generously offered Don Pablo to pass the night with him by sharing the small lodging he had not far from the Plaza de la Merced, and the young man eagerly accepted. It was too late to seek a lodging at a locanda, and in this way he would be all the sooner with his sister next morning. After a lengthened leave-taking, they, therefore, left the house, and, so soon as they were gone, Dona Clara threw herself, ready dressed, into a hammock hanging at one end of the room, when she speedily fell asleep.

On reaching the street, Don Pablo saw a body lying motionless in front of the house.

"What's this?" he asked, in surprise.

"A poor wretch whom the ladrones killed in order to plunder him," the missionary answered.

"That is possible."

"Perhaps he is not quite dead, the missionary went on; "it is our duty to succour him,"

"For what good?" Don Pablo said; "if a sereno were to pass he might accuse us."

"Nay, sir," the missionary observed, "the ways of the Lord are impenetrable. It He allowed us to come across this unhappy man, it was because he judged in His wisdom that we might prove of use to him."

"Be it so," the young man said; "let us look at him as you wish it. But you know that in this country good actions generally entail annoyance."

"That is true, my son. Well, we will run the risk," said the missionary, who had already bent over the wounded man.

"As you please," Don Pablo said, as he followed him.

"Shaw, for it was he, gave no signs of life. The missionary examined him, then rose hastily, seized Don Pablo's arm, and drew him to him, as he whispered—

"Look!"

"Shaw!" the Mexican exclaimed in surprise; "what could that man be doing here?"

"Help me, and we shall learn. The poor fellow has only fainted."

Don Pablo, greatly perplexed by this singular meeting, obeyed the missionary, without further remark. The two men raised the wounded lad, and carried him gently to Father Seraphin's lodging.

They had scarce turned the corner of the street, when several men appeared at the other extremity. They were Red Cedar and his confederates. On arriving in front of the house they stopped.

"Which is the girl's room?" the squatter asked in a whisper.

"This one," Nathan said, as he pointed to it.

Red Cedar crawled up to the house, drove his dagger into the wall, raised himself to the window, and placed his face against a pane.

"All is well! she sleeps!" he said, when he came down. "You, Fray Ambrosio, to one corner of the street; you, Garote, to the other."

The monk and the gambusino went to their allotted posts. When Red Cedar was alone with his son he bent and whispered in his ear—

"What did you do with your brother after stabbing him?"

"I left him on the spot where he fell."

"Where was that?"

"Just where we now stand."

The squatter stooped down to the ground, and walked a few steps, carefully examining the bloody traces left on the pebbles.

"He has been carried off," he said, when he rose again. "Perhaps he is not dead."

"Perhaps so," the young man observed, with a shake of his head.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

INDIAN DIPLOMACY.

WE will return, for the present, to Valentine and his comrades.

The sudden apparition of the sachem of the Coras had produced a certain degree of emotion among the hunters and the Comanches. Valentine, the first to recover from his surprise, addressed Eagle-wing.

"My brother is welcome," he said. "What news does the chief bring us?"

"Good," the Coras answered laconically.

"All the better," the hunter said gaily; "for some time past all we have received has been so bad that my brother's will create a diversion."

"My brother can speak," Valentine continued; "he is surrounded by none but friends."

"I know it" the chief answered, as he bowed gracefully to the company. "Since I left my brother two months have passed away: I have worn out many mocassins amid the thorns and brambles of the desert: I have been beyond the Great Lakes to the villages of my nation."

"Good; my brother is a chief; he was doubtless well received by the sachems of the Coras."

"Mookapee is a renowned warrior among his people," the Indian answered proudly; his place by the council-fire of the nation is pointed out. The chiefs saw him with joy: on his road he had taken the scalps of seven gachupinos.

"It was your right to do so chief, and I cannot blame you. The Spaniards have done you harm enough for you to requite them."

"My brother speaks well; his skin is white, but his heart is red."

"Hum," observed Valentine; I am a friend to justice; vengeance is permissible against treachery."

The hunter's comrades had drawn nearer, and now formed a circle round the two speakers. Curumida was occupied silently, as was his wont, in completely stripping each Spanish prisoner whom he then bound in such a way that the slightest movement was impossible.

Valentine, although time pressed, knew too well the red-skin character to try and hurry Eagle-wing on. He felt certain that the chief had important news to communicate to him; but it would have been no use trying to draw it from him; hence he allowed him to act as he pleased.

"Did my brother remain long with his tribe?" Valentine continued.

"Two suns. Eagle-wing had left behind him friends to whom his heart drew him."

"Thanks, chief, for the pleasant recollections of us."

"The chief assembled in council to hear the words of Eagle-wing," the Coras continued. "They shuddered with fury on hearing of the massacre of their children; and two hundred warriors are assembled beneath my *totem*."

"Good!" said Valentine, "the chief will avenge himself."

The Indian smiled.

"Yes," he said, "my young men have their orders."

"Very good; in that case they are near here?"

"No," the chief replied, with a shake of his head. Eagle-wing does not march with them; he has hidden himself under the skin of an Apache dog."

"What does my brother say?" Valentine asked.

"My white brother is quick," Unicorn said, sententiously "he will let Mookapee speak. He is a great sachem, and wisdom dwells in him."

"Answering one act of treachery by another: that is not the way in which the warriors of my nation behave," Valentine said.

"The nation of my brother is great, and strong as the grizzly bear," Unicorn said; "it does not need to march along at hidden paths. The poor Indians are weak as the beaver, but like him they are very cunning."

"That is true," Valentine replied, "cunning must be allowed you in dealing with the implacable enemies who surround you. I was wrong; so go on, chief?"

"Does my brother know that the *Gringo* has asked the Apaches for a guide?"

"No, I did not."

"Good. Stanapat, the great chief of the Apaches, sent a Navajo warrior to act as guide to Red Cedar."

"Well?"

"The Navajo was scalped by Eagle-wing."

"Ah, ah! then Red Cedar cannot set out?"

"Yes, he can do so when he likes."

"How so?"

"Because Eagle-wing takes the place of the guide."

Unicorn smiled.

"My brother has a deal of wisdom," he said.

"Hum!" Valentine remarked, "it is possible, but you play for a heavy stake chief. That old villain will recognise you."

"No."

"I hope not; for if he does, you are a lost man."

"Good, my brother can be easy. Eagle-wing is a warrior; he will see the white hunter again."

"I wish so, chief; but I doubt. However, act as you please. When will you join Red Cedar?"

"This night."

"You are going to leave us?"

"At once. Eagle-wing has nothing more to confide to his brother."

And after bowing courteously to the company, the Coras chief glided into the thicket, in which he disappeared almost instantaneously.

"Yes," said Valentine, with a thoughtful air, "his project is a daring one, such as might be expected from so great a warrior. May heaven protect him, and allow him to succeed! "The clothes?" he asked of Curumilla.

"Here they are," the Aucas answered, pointing to an enormous heap of clothing.

"What does my brother mean to do with them?" Unicorn asked.

"My brother will see," Valentine said, with a smile, each of us is going to put on one of these uniforms."

The Comanche drew himself up haughtily.

"No," he said, "Unicorn does not put off the dress of his people."

"In order to enter the camp of the Spaniards without being discovered."

"Wah! for what good? Unicorn will summon his young men to cut a passage through the corpses of the gachupinos."

But Valentine shook his head mournfully.

"It is true," he remarked, "we could do so. But why shed blood needlessly?"

"The hunter will act rightly. Unicorn knows it, and he leaves him free; but Unicorn is a chief; he cannot put on the clothes of the pale-faces."

"Valentine no longer insisted, as it would have been unavailing; so he agreed to modify his plan.

"Then the chief will remain here," he said, "to guard the prisoners."

"Good," the Comanche answered. "Is Unicorn then a chattering old woman, that warriors place him on one side?"

"My brother does not understand me. I do not wish to insult him, but he cannot enter the camp with us."

The chief shrugged his shoulders disdainfully.

"The Comanche warriors can crawl as well as serpents. Unicorn will enter."

"Let my brother come, then, since he wishes it."

"Good, my brother is vexed; a cloud has passed over his face; he is wrong; his friend loves him."

"I know it, chief, I know it. I am not vexed, but my heart is sad to see a warrior thus run the risk of being killed without any necessity."

"Unicorn is a sachem; he must give an example to his young men on the war-path."

"Here are the horses of the pale-faces," Curumilla said; "my brother will need them."

"That is true," the hunter answered, with a smile; "my brother is a great chief, he thinks of everything."

"Caballero," Valentine said to the Alferez, "you will act as our guide to the camp. We do not wish to take the lives of your countrymen; our intention is simply to prevent them following us at present. Pay attention to my words; if you attempt to deceive us, I blow out your brains. You are warned."

The Spaniard bowed, but made no reply. When they came a short distance from the bivouac, a sentry challenged, "Who goes there?"

"Answer," Valentine whispered the Alferez.

He did so. They passed, and the sentry, suddenly seized by Curumilla, was bound and gagged in the twinkling of an eye, all the other sentinels sharing the same fate. The regiment of dragoons had been surprised without striking a blow.

Valentine's comrades dismounted; they knew exactly how to act, and did not deviate from the instructions given by their leader. They proceeded from picquet to picquet, removing the horses, which were led out of camp. Within twenty minutes all had been carried off. Valentine had anxiously followed the movements of his men. When they had finished, he raised the curtain of the colonel's tent, and found himself face to face with Unicorn, from whose waist-belt hung a reeking scalp. Valentine could not repress a movement of horror.

"What have you done, chief?" he asked.

"Unicorn has killed his enemy," the Comanche replied, peremptorily. "When the leader of the antelopes is killed, his flock disperses."

Valentine drew near the colonel. The unhappy man, fearfully mutilated, with his brain laid bare, and his heart pierced by the knife of the implacable Indian, lay stark dead in a pool of blood, in the middle of the tent. The hunter vented a sigh at this sorry sight.

"Poor devil!" he said, with an air of compassion.

After this short funeral oration, he took away his sabre and epaulettes, left the tent, followed by the Indian chief and rejoined his comrades.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE STRANGER.

FATHER SERAPHIN and Don Pablo went left bearing the wounded man to the missionary's lodging. Although the house to which they were proceeding was but a short distance off, yet the two gentlemen, compelled to take every precaution, employed considerable time on the journey. Nearly every step they were compelled to halt, so as not to fatigue too greatly the wounded man, whose inert limbs swayed in every direction.

"The man is dead," Don Pablo remarked, during a halt they made on the Plaza de la Merced.

"I fear so," the missionary answered, sadly; "still, as we are not certain of it, our conscience bids us to bestow our care on him."

"Father, the love of one's neighbour often carries you too far; better were it perhaps, if this wretch did not come back to life."

"You are severe, my friend. This man is still young—almost a boy. Who knows whether this fearful wound may not offer him the means to enter the society of honest people, which he has till now been ignorant of?"

"I will do what you wish, father. Still, I fear that all our care will be thrown away."

"God, whose humble instruments we are, will prove you wrong, I hope. Come, a little courage; a few paces further, and we shall have arrived."

"Come on, then," Don Pablo said, with resignation.

Father Seraphin lodged at a house of modest appearance, built of adobes and reeds, in a small room he hired from a poor widow, for the small sum of nine reals a month. This room, very small, and which only received air from a window opening on an inner yard, was a perfect conventual cell, as far as furniture was concerned, for the latter consisted of a wooden frame, over which a bull-hide was stretched, and served as the missionary's bed; a butacca and a prie-dieu, above which a copper crucifix was fastened to the whitewashed wall. But, like all cells, this room was marvellously clean. From a few nails hung the well worn clothes of the poor priest, and a shelf supported vials and flasks which doubtless contained medicaments; for, like all the missionaries, Father Seraphin had a rudimentary knowledge of medicine, and took in charge both the souls and bodies of his neophytes.

The father lit a candle of yellow tallow standing in an iron candlestick, and, aided by Don Pablo, laid the wounded man on his own bed; after which the young man fell back into the butacca to regain his breath. Father Seraphin, on whom, spite of his fragile appearance, the fatigue had produced no apparent effect, then went down stairs to lock the street-door, which he had left open. As he pushed it to, he felt an opposition outside, and a man soon entered the yard.

"Pardon, my reverend father," the stranger said; "but be kind enough not to leave me outside."

"Do you live in this house?"

"No," the stranger coolly replied, "I do not live in Santa Fé, where I am quite unknown."

"Do you ask hospitality of me, then?"

"Not at all, reverend father."

"Then what do you want?" the missionary said.

"I wish to follow you to the room where you have laid the wounded man."

"This request, sir——" the priest said, hesitating.

"Has nothing that need surprise you. I have the greatest interest in seeing with my own eyes in what state that man is."

"Are you a relation or friend of his?"

"Neither one nor the other. Still, I repeat to you, very weighty reasons compel me to see him and speak with him, if that be possible."

Father Seraphin took a searching glance at the speaker. He was a man of great height, apparently in the fullest vigour of life. His features, so far as it was possible to distinguish them by the pale and tremulous moonbeams, were handsome, though an expression of unbending will was the marked thing about them. He wore the dress of rich Mexican hacendados, and had in his right hand a magnificently inlaid American rifle. Still the missionary hesitated.

"Well," the stranger continued, "have you made up your mind, father?"

"Sir," Father Seraphin answered with firmness, "do not take in ill part what I am going to say to you."

The stranger bowed.

"You insist, with strange tenacity, on seeing the poor man whom Christian charity compelled me to pick up. Prudence demands that I should refuse to let you see him."

A certain annoyance was depicted on the stranger's features.

"You are right, father," he answered; "appearances are against me. Unfortunately, the explanation you demand from me justly would make us lose too much precious time, hence I cannot give them to you at this moment. All I can do

is to swear, in the face of heaven, on that crucifix you wear round your neck, and which is the symbol of our redemption, that I only wish well to the man you have housed, and that I am this moment seeking to punish a great criminal."

The missionary felt convinced; he took up the crucifix and offered it to this extraordinary man.

"I swear it," he replied in a firm voice.

"Good," the priest went on, "now you can enter, sir; I will not even ask your name. Follow me, sir."

"My name would teach you nothing, father," the stranger said sadly.

The missionary locked the door and led the stranger to his room, on entering which the new-comer took off his hat reverently, took up a post in a corner of the room, and did not stir.

"Do not trouble yourself about me, father," he said in a whisper, "and put implicit faith in the oath I took."

The missionary only replied by a nod, and the wounded man gave no sign of life, but still lay much in the position he was first placed in. For a long time, however, the attention he lavished on him proved sterile, and seemed to produce no effect on the squatter's son. At this moment the stranger walked up to him.

"My father," he said, touching him gently on the arm, "you have done all that was humanly possible, but have not succeeded. Will you permit me to try in my turn?"

"Do you fancy you will prove more successful than I?" the priest asked in surprise. "You see I have tried everything that the medical art prescribes in such a case."

"That is true, father; but the Indians possess certain secrets known only to themselves. Some of them have been revealed to me; if you will permit me, I will try their effects on this young man, who is in a desperate condition."

"I fear he is, poor fellow."

"We shall, therefore, run no risk in trying my superior remedy upon him."

"Certainly not."

The stranger bent over the young man, and regarded him for a moment with fixed attention; then he drew from his pocket a flask of carved crystal, filled with a fluid as green as emerald. With the point of his dagger he slightly opened the wounded man's closed teeth, and poured into his mouth four or five drops of the fluid contained in the flask. The stranger returned to his dark corner. Suddenly the young man passed his hand over his dank forehead, and muttered in a hollow voice—

"Ellen, my sister, it is too late. I cannot save her. See, see, they are carrying her off; she is lost!"

And he fell back on the bed, as the three men rushed towards him.

"He sleeps!" the missionary said in amazement.

"He is saved!" the stranger answered.

"What did he want to say, though?" Don Pablo inquired anxiously.

"That lad wished to deliver your sister."

"Heavens!" cried Pablo.

"He was stabbed at the door of the house where she sought shelter. Those who stabbed him wished to get him out of the way, in order to carry her off a second time."

"Ah!" Don Pablo exclaimed in despair, "my father—let us fly to my sister's aid!"

The two gentlemen rushed from the house with a presentiment of misfortune. When the stranger found himself alone with the wounded man, he walked up to him, wrapped him in his cloak, threw him over his shoulders as easy as if he were

only a child, and went out in his turn. On reaching the street, he carefully closed the door, and went off at a great rate, soon disappearing in the darkness. At the same instant the melancholy voice of the *sereno* could be heard chanting—

"*Ave Maria purissima!*" "*Los cuatro han dado!*" "*Viva Mexico!*" "*Todo es quieto!*" "Hail, most pure Mary!" "It has struck four!" "Long live Mexico!" "All is quiet."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

GENERAL VENTURA.

It was about six in the morning. A dazzling sun poured down its transparent rays on the streets of the Presidio of Santa Fé, which was already full of noise and movement at that early hour of the morning. General Ventura slept that pleasant morning sleep, in which the body, entirely rested from its fatigue, leaves the mind the entire liberty of its faculties. Suddenly the door of the sleeping-room in which the worthy governor reposed was torn violently open, and an officer entered. General Ventura, aroused with a start, sat up in his bed, fixing on the importunate visitor a glance, at first stern, but which at once became uneasy on seeing the alarm depicted on the officer's features.

"What is the matter, Senor Captain Don Lopez?" he asked, trying in vain to give firmness to his voice.

Captain Lopez was a soldier of fortune, who had grown gray in harness, and contracted a species of rough frankness, that prevented him toning the truth down under any circumstances, which fact made him appear, in the general's eyes, a bird of very evil omen. To the general's query the captain only replied the following three storm-laden words—

"Nothing that's good."

"What do you mean? Have the people rebelled?"

"On my word, no! I do not fancy they even dream of such a thing."

"Very well, then," the general went on, "what the deuce have you to tell me captain?"

"I have not come to tell you anything," the other said roughly. "There is a soldier outside who has just come from I don't know where, and who insists on speaking with you. Shall I bring him, or send him about his business?"

"One moment," exclaimed the general, whose features had suddenly become gloomy; "who is the soldier?"

"A dragoon, I fancy."

"A dragoon! let him come in at once. May Heaven bless you, with all your circumlocution! The man, doubtless, brings me news of the arrival of the regiment I am expecting."

The captain shrugged his shoulders with an air of doubt.

"What is it now?" the general said, "what are you going to say?"

"Nothing, except that the soldier looks very sad to be the bearer of such good news."

"We shall soon know what we have to depend on. Let him come in."

"That is true," said the captain, as he went off.

During this conversation the general had leaped from his bed, and dressed himself with the promptness peculiar to soldiers. He now anxiously awaited the appearance of the trooper who Don Lopez had announced to him.

A few minutes were thus passed in febrile restlessness. All at once a great noise was heard in the Plaza Mayor. The general went to a window and looked out. A tumultuous and dense crowd was thronging every street leading to the square, and

uttering sharp cries. This crowd momentarily increasing, seemed urged on by something terrible.

"What is this?" the general exclaimed; "and what can be the meaning of this disturbance?"

At this moment the shouts grew louder, and the detachment of Comanche warriors appeared debouching by the Calle de la Merced, and marching in good order, and at quick step upon the palace.

"The Indians again!" he said; "how can they dare to present themselves here? They must be ignorant of the arrival of the dragoons. Such boldness is incomprehensible."

He let the curtain fall, and turned away. The soldier whom the captain had announced stood before him, waiting the general's pleasure to question him. The general started on perceiving him. He was pale; his uniform was torn and stained with mud, as if he had made a long journey on foot through brambles. As he was opening his mouth to ask the man a question, the door flew back, and several officers, among whom was Captain Don Lopez, entered the room.

"General," the captain said, "make haste! You are expected in the council hall, The Indians have come."

"Well! why this startled look, gentlemen?" the general said severely. "I am not at the orders of those savages, so tell them that I have no time to grant them an audience."

The officers gazed at the general with a surprise they did not attempt to conceal, on hearing these strange and incomprehensible words.

"Good, good," Captain Lopez said, "the town is not yet fired, 'tis true; but it might be so."

"What do you mean?" the general asked, as he turned pale. "Are matters so serious?"

"They are most serious. We have not a moment to lose, if we wish to avoid heavy disasters."

"Gentlemen, said the General, in an ill-assured voice, "it is our duty to watch over the safety of the population. I follow you."

And taking no further heed of the soldier, he proceeded towards the council-hall.

The disorder that had prevailed without had at length gained the interior of the palace. Nothing was to be heard but shrieks or exclamations of anger and terror. The Mexican officers assembled in the hall were tumultuously discussing the measures to be adopted in order to save a contest and the town. The entrance of the governor produced a healthy effect upon them, in so far that the discussion suddenly ceased, and calmness was restored.

General Ventura regretted in his heart having counted on imaginary help, and not having listened to the sensible advice of some of his officers, who urged him the previous day to satisfy the Indians by giving them what they asked. In spite of the terror he felt, however, his pride revolted at being compelled to treat on equal terms with barbarians, and accept harsh conditions which they would doubtless impose on him, in the consciousness of having the upper hand.

The governor, in entering the hall, looked round the assembly anxiously. All had taken their places, and, externally, at least, had assumed that grace and stern appearance belonging to men who are penetrated with the grandeur of the duties they have to perform, and are resolved to carry them out at all hazards. But this appearance was very deceptive. All these men, habituated to a slothful and effeminate life, did not feel capable of waging a contest with the rude enemies who menaced them so audaciously.

Under present circumstances, however, resistance was impossible. The Indians were masters of the town. There were no troops to oppose to them; hence the only

hope was to make the easiest terms possible with the Comanches. When every one had given his opinion the governor rose, and said in a trembling voice—

"Caballeros. All of us here present are men of courage, and have displayed that quality in many difficult circumstances. Certainly, if the only thing was to sacrifice our lives to save the hapless townsmen, we would not hesitate to do so, for we are too well imbued with the soundness of our duties to hesitate; but, unhappily, that sacrifice would not avail to save those whom we wish before all to protect. Let us treat, then with the barbarians, as we cannot conquer them. Perhaps in this way we shall succeed in protecting our wives and children from the danger that menaces them. In acting thus under the grave circumstances in which we find ourselves, we shall at least have the consolation of having done our duty, even if we do not obtain all we desire."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE COMANCHES.

VALENTINE and his friends awoke at daybreak. The Comanches were already prepared to start; and Unicorn, dressed in his great war costume, presented himself to the hunter.

"Is my brother going?" Valentine asked him.

"Yes," the sachem answered. "I am returning to the Presidio, to receive the answer."

"What is my brother's intention, should his demand be rejected?"

Unicorn smiled.

"The Comanches have long lances," he said.

"My anxiety will be extreme till you return, chief; the Spaniards are perfidious."

"They would not dare," Unicorn said haughtily. "If the chief, whom my brother loves, is not delivered to me safe and sound, the Spanish prisoners shall be tortured on the plaza of Santa Fé, the town burned and sacked."

"Good! Unicorn is a wise chief; he will do what is necessary."

In the meantime the Comanche warriors had formed their ranks, and only awaited the signal of the sachem to start. The Spanish prisoners taken during the night were placed in the centre, bound and half naked. Suddenly a disturbance was heard in the camp, and two men rushed panting toward the spot where stood Valentine, the sachem, and Curumilla. They were Don Pablo and Father Seraphin, their clothes in disorder, their features haggard, and their faces glistening with perspiration. On reaching their friends, they fell, almost in a fainting state, on the ground. The proper attentions were at once paid them, and the missionary was the first to recover. Don Pablo seemed stupefied; the tears poured incessantly down his cheeks, and he could not utter a word. Valentine felt strangely alarmed.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "what has happened? Don Miguel——?"

"No," he said, "nothing has happened to him, as far as I know."

"Heaven be praised! But what is the matter, father? What misfortune have you to announce to me?"

"A frightful one, indeed, my son," the missionary replied: "Dona Clara——"

"Well!" the hunter said sharply.

"Was captured again last night by Red Cedar, and torn from the refuge where placed her."

"Oh!" Valentine exclaimed, with concentrated fury, as he stamped his foot, "always that demon—that accursed Red Cedar. My curses on him! But take courage, father; let us first save Don Miguel."

Unicorn advanced.

"Master of prayer," he said to Father Seraphin, in a soft and impressive voice, "your heart is good. The Comanches love you. Unicorn will help you. Pray to your God. He will protect us in our researches."

Then the chief turned to Don Pablo, and laid his hand firmly on his shoulder.

"Women weep," he said; "men avenge themselves. Has not my brother his rifle?"

On feeling the Comanche's hand laid on him—on hearing these words—the young man quivered as if he had received an electric shock. He drew himself up, and fixed on the chief his eyes burning with the fever of sorrow.

"Yes," he said, in a broken voice, "you are right, chief," and passing his hand over his eyes with a gesture of rage, "let us leave tears to women, who have no other weapons to protect their weakness. I am a man, and will avenge myself.

"Good! My brother speaks well; he is a warrior; Unicorn esteems him; he will become great on the war path."

Don Pablo, crushed for a moment, had regained all his energy; he was no longer the same man; he looked around him.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To Santa Fé, to deliver your father."

"I will go with you."

"Come," said Unicorn.

"No," Valentine interposed authoritatively. "Your place is not there, Don Pablo; leave the Comanche warriors to act as they please; they do not need your help to carry out their plans properly. Remain with me."

"Command me, my friend," the young man said, "I have perfect confidence in your experience."

"Good. You are reasonable. Brother," he added, turning to the chief, "you can start. The sun is already high in the horizon."

Unicorn gave the signal for departure. The Comanches uttered their war-yell, while brandishing their arms, and started at a quick amble, the only pace they know. Curumilla then rose, and wrapped himself in his buffalo robe; Valentine watching him inquiringly.

"Where is my brother going?"

"To look for the camp of Red Cedar's gambusinos," the Indian replied with a cunning smile.

"Good," Valentine said, gleefully. "My brother is a wise chief; he forgets nothing."

"Curumilla loves his brother; he thinks for him," the chief answered, simply.

After uttering these words, the Unicorn bowed gracefully, and proceeded in the direction of the Paso del Norte, soon disappearing in the windings of the road. Valentine looked after him for a long while. When he no longer saw him, he let his head fall pensively on his chest.

At length Valentine raised his head, passed his hand over his brow, as if to dispel these sad thoughts, and turned to his friends.

"Pardon me," he said, "but I, at times, give way to my thoughts in that fashion. Alas! I, too, have suffered; but let us leave that," he added gaily. "Bygones must be bygones. Let us attend to your affairs."

He made them a sign to sit down by his side on the grass, rummaged his alforjas and produced some slight food, which he laid before them.

"Eat," he said to them; "we do not know what awaits us within the next few hours, and we must recruit our strength. When you have satisfied your appetite, you will tell me all about Dona Clara being carried off again, for I must have the fullest details."

We will leave the three now conversing, and join the Comanches and Unicorn again.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

NEGOTIATIONS.

WHEN Unicorn entered the council-chamber, preceded by Captain Lopez, and followed by the three Indian chiefs, the deepest silence prevailed among the Spanish officers assembled to meet him. The governor, seated in a chair placed in the centre of the hall, was looking nervously round him, while tapping on the arm of the chair with the fingers of his right hand. Still, his countenance was tolerably composed. He answered by a nod the ceremonious bow of the Comanches, and drew himself up as if intending to address them; but if such were his desire, Unicorn did not grant him time to do so.

"I salute my father!" he said, in a loud and fierce voice. "I have come, as was agreed on yesterday, to fetch the answer he owes me."

The general hesitated for an instant.

"I am waiting!" the Indian went on.

The general, forced almost into his last entrenchment, saw that the hour for surrender had at length arrived, and that no way of escape was left him.

"Chief," he answered, in anything but a firm voice, "your behaviour naturally surprises me. To my knowledge the Spaniards are not at war with your nation; the whites have not done anything of which you have a right to complain. For what reason do you come, then, against the sworn faith, and when nothing authorizes you, to invade a defenceless town?"

The sachem understood that the Spaniard was trying to shift the question on to other ground.

"My father does not answer my request," he said. Still, in order to have finished at once with the recriminations he brings up, I will answer his questions peremptorily, separating them one from the other. In the first place, my father knows very well that the pale-faces and red-skins have been in a constant state of warfare since the arrival of white men in America. This war may have slightly relaxed at intervals, but has never really ceased. Secondly, my father said that nothing has been done of which we had a right to complain. My father is mistaken, we have a cause, the imprisonment of Don Miguel Zarate, who, himself an Indian, has never belied his origin. Hence, my father must no longer ask by what right I am here, for that is perfectly established. Now that fact is cleared up, let us pass to another. When I came here, yesterday, my father gave me to understand that my propositions would be accepted, and the exchange of prisoners carried out."

"It is possible, chief," the general replied; "but no one knows to-day what he will do to-morrow. With night reflection has come, and, in short, your propositions have appeared to me unacceptable."

"Wah!" the Indian said, though not testifying his surprise otherwise.

"Yes," the general continued, growing animated, "I should be ashamed to grant them, for I should have the appearance of only yielding to threats. No, it cannot be. The two gentlemen you claim are guilty, and shall die."

The Mexican officers warmly applauded this haughty response, which they were far from expecting. They felt their courage rekindled, and did not despair of obtaining better conditions. A smile of disdain played round the chief's haughty lips.

"Good," he said; "my father speaks very loudly. The coyotes are bold when they hunt the buffalo in packs. He wishes for war, then?"

"No," the general quickly interposed. "Heaven forbid! I should be glad to settle this matter amicably with you, chief, but honour forbids me subscribing those disgraceful proposals."

"Is it really honour that has dictated my father's answer?" the Indian asked ironically. "He will permit me to doubt it. In short, whatever be the reason that guides him, I can but withdraw; but, before doing so, I will give him news of a friend whom he doubtless expects."

"What means that word doubtless?"

"This," the Indian said sharply. "The warriors whom my father expected to arrive to his aid this day have been dispersed by my young men, as the autumn breeze sweeps away the leaves. They will not come."

A murmur of terror ran through the assembly. The sachem let the long folds of his buffalo robe fall back, tore from his girdle the bleeding scalp that hung there, and threw it at the general's feet.

"That," he said gloomily, "is the scalp of the man who commanded my father's warriors! Does the chief of the pale-faces recognise it?"

A shudder of terror ran round the room at the sight of the scalp; the general felt the small dose of courage that had still animated him oozing out.

"Chief," he exclaimed in a trembling voice, "is it possible you have done that?"

"I have done it," the sachem answered coldly. "Now farewell. I am about to join my young men, who are impatient at my long absence."

With these words the Comanche haughtily turned his back on the governor, and walked toward the door.

"A few moments longer, chief," the general said.

The Comanche gave the speaker a glance which made him quiver.

"Here is my last word," he said. "I insist on the two prisoners being handed over to me."

"They shall be."

"Good; but no perfidy, no treachery!"

"We will act honourably," the general replied.

"We shall see. My warriors and myself will remain on the square till my father has performed his promise. If, within an hour, the pale-faces are not free, the prisoners I hold will be pitilessly massacred."

The pride of the Mexicans was quelled, and they at length recognised that nothing could save them from the vengeance of the Comanche chief. The general bowed in assent, not having the strength to answer otherwise. The sight of the scalp had paralysed in him all desire to contend longer.

When the Indians left the council-chamber, the Mexicans rose tumultuously, for each feared the execution of the chief's threats. General Ventura was pressed on all sides to make haste, and run no risk of breaking his word.

"Caballeros," he said, "you have heard this man. You understand as well as I did the menaces he dared to offer us. Shall such an insult be left unpunished? Will you allow yourselves to be thus braved in the heart of the town by a handful of scoundrels, and not attempt to inflict on them the chastisement they deserve? To arms, caballeros and let us die bravely, if it must be so, sooner than suffer this stain on the old Spanish honour our fathers transmitted to us!"

This warm address produced the effect the general anticipated from it; that is to say, it redoubled, were that possible, the terror of the hearers, who had long been acquainted with their chief's cowardice, and knew how little he could be depended on. This sudden warlike order seemed to them so unusual, and before all so inopportune, that they pressed him to accept, without delay, the proposals dictated by the sachem. This was all the governor wanted.

"As you insist," he said, "and nothing can induce you to offer an

resistance, I will myself proceed to the prison, in order to avoid any misunderstanding, and have the doors open for Don Miguel Zarate and General Ibanez."

"Make haste, pray!" the officers answered.

The general, glad in his heart at having got out of the scrape so well, left the Cabildo, and walked across the square to the prison, which stood on the opposite side.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FREE.

DON MIGUEL and General Ibanez were completely ignorant of what was going on outside, and the rumours of the town did not reach their ears. Had they deigned to question their jailer, the latter who was beginning to fear for himself the effect of the ill-treatment he had made the two gentlemen undergo, would doubtless have not hesitated to give them all possible information, for the sake of regaining their favour; but each time this man presented himself before them, and opened his mouth to speak, they turned their backs contemptuously.

On this day, according to their wont, the two prisoners had risen at sunrise, and then, with incredible coolness, began conversing on indifferent topics. Suddenly a great noise was heard in the prison, a clang of arms reached the prisoners' ears, and hurried footsteps approached the rooms in which they were confined. They listened.

"Oh, oh!" said Ibanez. "I fancy it is for to-day at last."

"Heaven be praised!" Don Miguel answered. "I am glad."

"On my honour and so am I," the general said gaily; "time was beginning to hang heavy in this prison, where a man has not the slightest relaxation. We are going to see that splendid sun, which seems afraid to show itself in this den."

Still the noise grew nearer and nearer, and confused voices were mingling with the echoing steps in the passage, and the rattling of sabres.

"Here they are," said Don Miguel; "we shall see them in a minute."

"They are welcome if they bring us death, that supreme solace of the afflicted."

At this moment a key creaked in the lock, and the door opened. The two prisoners fell back in surprise on seeing the general, who rushed into the cell, followed by two or three officers. Assuredly, if the prisoners expected to see anybody, it was not the worthy General Ventura. Ibanez could not refrain from exclaiming, with that accent of caustic gaiety which formed the basis of his character—

"What the deuce do you want here, senor governor? Have you, too, suddenly become a frightful conspirator, such as we are accused of being?"

Before answering, the general fell back into a chair, wiping away the perspiration that trickled down his forehead, such speed had he displayed in coming to the prison.

"Have you by any chance, my dear governor," General Ibanez said, gaily, though not believing a word of it, "come to restore us to liberty? That would be a most gallant action, and I should feel deeply indebted to you for it."

General Ventura raised his head, fixed on the prisoners eyes sparkling with joy, and said, in a panting voice—

"Yes, my friends, yes; I would come myself to tell you that you are free; I would not yield to any one else the pleasure of announcing the good news."

The prisoners fell back in amazement.

"What!" General Ibanez exclaimed, "are you speaking seriously?"

"Come, come," General Ventura cried, "this hole is frightful; do not remain any longer in it."

"Ah!" Don Miguel remarked, bitterly, "you find it frightful; you have been a long time in discovering the fact; for we have lived in it nearly a month."

"Do not be angry with me, Don Miguel," the governor answered eagerly, "it was greatly against my will you were detained so long. Come away; do not remain a moment longer in this pestilential den."

"Pardon me, Caballero," Don Miguel said coldly, "but, with your permission, we will remain a few moments longer in it."

"Why so?" General Ventura asked, opening his eyes to their fullest extent.

"I will tell you."

Don Miguel pointed to a chair, and sat down himself. General Ibanez followed his example.

"I am waiting your pleasure to explain yourself," the governor at last said, as he was anxious to get away, and time pressed.

"I am about doing so," Don Miguel answered; "you have come to tell us we are free, sir; but you do not say on what conditions."

"What do you mean by conditions?" the general asked, not understanding him.

"Of course," Ibanez went on, supporting his friend; "and these conditions, too, must suit us; you must see, my dear sir, we cannot leave this delightful place without knowing the why or wherefore. *Viva Cristo!* we are not vagabonds to be got rid of in that way."

"The general is right, sir," the hacendero said in his turn; "the care of our honour does not permit us to accept a liberation which might stain it."

The governor hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels, he had never before had to deal with such obstinate prisoners. He racked his brains in vain to discover why it was that men condemned to death could so peremptorily decline their liberty. Still, he must induce them to quit the prison, for time was fast slipping away, and their obstinacy might ruin everything. Hence, General Ventura made up his mind like a man.

"Gentlemen," he said, with feigned admiration, "I understand what nobleness there is in your scruples, and am happy to see that I was not mistaken in the greatness of your character; you can leave this prison in full security, and take once more the station that belongs to you in the world. I will lay no conditions on you; you are free, purely and simply."

While saying this, the governor drew from his breast an enormous bundle of papers, which he offered Don Miguel. The latter declined them with an air of disgust; but, General Ibanez, less scrupulous or wiser in his generation, eagerly clutched them, looked through them, to see that the governor was not deceiving him, and then threw them into the *brasero*, standing in the middle of the room. General Ibanez watched them burning with a certain degree of pleasure, for he began to feel himself really free.

"I am waiting for you, gentlemen," said the governor.

"One word more, by your leave," the hacendero remarked.

"Speak, sir."

"On leaving this prison, where are we to go?"

"Wherever you please, gentlemen. I repeat to you that you are perfectly free, and can act as you think proper."

"Good, sir," Don Miguel said, holding out his hand to General Ventura, "your conduct affects me—thanks."

The governor blushed.

"Come, come," he said, to hide his embarrassment on receiving this so ill-deserved praise.

The prisoners no longer hesitated to follow him.

In the meanwhile, the news of Don Miguel's deliverance had spread through the town with the rapidity of a train of gunpowder. The inhabitants, reassured by the continence of the Comanches, and knowing that they had only come to save a man, in whose fate the entire population felt interested, had ventured to leave their houses, and at length thronged the streets and squares; the windows and roofs were filled with men, women, and children, whose eyes, fixed on the prison, awaited the moment of Don Miguel's appearance. When he did so, tremendous shouts greeted him. Unicorn walked up to the governor.

"My father has kept his promise," he said, gravely, "I will keep mine; the white prisoners are free."

The governor listened to these words with a blush; the sachem returned to the head of his war-party, which rapidly retired, followed by the shouts of a mob intoxicated with joy.

"What do you think of all that?" the hacendero asked his friend.

"Hum!" General Ibanez muttered, "the governor's conduct seems to me rather queer: but, no matter, we are free. I confess to you, my friend, that I should have no objection to go a little distance from this place, the air of which, despite General Ventura's protestations, appears to me remarkably unhealthy for us."

At this moment, and ere Don Miguel could answer, the general felt a slight touch on his shoulders; he turned, and saw Curumilla before him, with a smiling face.

"Come!" he said to them, laconically.

They followed him, with some difficulty, through the crowd that accompanied them with shouts, and whom they were obliged to stop and thank. On reaching a small street near the square, and which was nearly deserted, Curumilla led them to a house before which he stopped.

"It is here," he said, as he tapped twice.

The door opened, and they entered a courtyard, in which were three ready-saddled horses, held by a groom, which they at once mounted.

The three men started at full speed. Ten minutes later they were out of the town, and galloping across the plain.

"Oh!" General Ibanez said, gaily, "how pleasant the fresh air is! How good it is to inhale it after remaining for two months stifled between the walls of a prison!"

"Shall we soon arrive?" Don Miguel asked.

"In an hour," the chief answered.

And they went on with renewed speed.

CHAPTER XL.

THE MEETING.

ON reaching the spot where the trail they were following formed a species of fork, Curumilla stopped.

"That is your road," the Araucano chief said. "At the end of that path you will see Koutonepi's bivouac fire. I must leave you here."

After uttering these words, Curumilla turned his horse and started, after giving them a parting wave of the hand. The Unicorn was not much of a talker naturally; generally, he did more than he said. His friends, convinced that urgent necessity could alone have forced him thus to break through his habits, made no observation but let him go.

The two gentlemen went on thus for nearly half an hour without exchanging a syllable; but, just as they turned a corner in the path, they saw a horseman about thirty paces in front of them, barring the road, and apparently waiting for them. The Mexicans examined him attentively. He was a tall man, well armed, and wearing the garb of the rich hacenderos; but, singularly enough, a black velvet mask, prevented them distinguishing his features. By an instinctive movement, Don Miguel and his friend moved a hand to their holsters, but they were empty.

"What is to be done?" the hacendero asked.

"Go on, of course. We have just escaped too great a peril for us to fear this. Even in the event of the mysterious being planted there before us, like an equestrian statue, trying to play us a trick, which is not impossible."

"Let us trust to Heaven," Don Miguel muttered.

The distance separating them from the stranger was soon cleared. On coming within five yards of him, they stopped.

"*Santas tardes, Caballeros,*" said the stranger, in a friendly voice.

"*Santas tardes!*" the gentlemen answered, in accord.

"I salute you, Don Miguel Zarate, and you, General Ibanez," the stranger then said. "I am happy to see you at length safe and sound out of the claws of that worthy General Ventura."

"Caballero," Don Miguel made answer, "I thank you for the kind words you address to me, and which can only come from a friend's lips. I should be pleased if you would take off the mask."

"Gentlemen, if I removed my mask it would be useless, for my features are unfamiliar to you. Do not be angry with me for keeping it on; but, be assured that you are not mistaken, I am really your friend."

The two Mexicans bowed courteously to each other, and the stranger went on.

"I knew that so soon as you were free you would hasten to join that worthy hunter Valentine. I placed myself here, where you must pass, in order to make you a communication of the utmost importance, which interests you extremely."

"I am listening, sir," Don Miguel responded with secret alarm; "and I beg you to accept, beforehand, my sincere thanks for the step you have taken."

"You will thank me when the time comes. To-day I only warn you: at a later date I hope to aid you."

"Speak, sir! You excite my curiosity to the highest pitch, and I am anxious to learn the news of which you have condescended to be the bearer."

The stranger shook his head sadly, and there was a moment's silence. At length the mask spoke again.

"Two months have elapsed, Don Miguel, since, through the treachery of Red Cedar, you were arrested and made prisoner at the Paso del Norte. Many events of which you are ignorant have occurred since then; but there is one I must inform you of at once. On the very night of your arrest, your daughter was carried off by Red Cedar."

"My daughter!" the hacendero exclaimed; "and Valentine to whom I confided her, and who was responsible for her safety?"

"Valentine attempted impossibilities to save her; but what can one man effect against twenty."

"After researches, long, sterile, and extraordinary efforts, a man, providentially aided by Father Seraphin, at length succeeded last night in taking Dona Clara from her ravishers; but Red Cedar, advised by some extraordinary chance, entered the house where the maiden had sought shelter, and carried her off again."

"Oh! I will avenge myself on that man!" the hacendero shouted, passionately. The stranger's eyes flashed with a lurid light.

"You will find your son and Father Seraphin with Valentine. Red Cedar intends

to start this evening, at the head of a band of gambusinos, to go into the deserts of the Rio Gila, in search of a placer, which his accomplice, Fray Ambrosio, has indicated to him."

"Fray Ambrosio!" the hacendero repeated.

"Yes. Your former chaplain, who served as spy to the squatter, revealed your plans to him, and provided him the means to carry off your daughter."

"Good," Don Miguel said in a hollow voice. "I will remember."

"Red Cedar, I know not with what design, is taking your daughter with him into the desert."

"I will follow him, were it for a thousand leagues," Don Miguel said resolutely. "Thanks to you for having instructed me so fully. But whence comes the interest you take in me?"

"You shall learn at a later date, Don Miguel. Now, before I leave you, one last word—an earnest warning."

"I listen attentively, Caballero."

"Do not tell any one—not even the French hunter, of our meeting. Let this secret be buried in your breast. When you reach the far west, if you see before you, at one of your bivouacs, a piece of mahogany bearing the impress of a horse's shoe, rise at midnight, and leave the camp. When you have gone one hundred paces in the tall grass, whistle thrice; a similar whistle will answer you, and then you will learn many things important for you to know."

"Good. Thanks. I will do what you tell me."

"You promise it?"

"I swear it on my word as a gentleman," Don Miguel said, as he took off his hat.

"I accept your oath. Farewell."

"Farewell."

The stranger dug his spurs into his horse's sides, and the animal started off as if impelled by a tornado.

"Who can that man be?" said Don Miguel.

"I know no more than you do. *Viva Cristo!*" his friend answered, "but I assure you I will know, even if to do so I have to search all the thickets and caverns in the desert."

"What!" Don Miguel exclaimed, "do you intend to come with me?"

"Did you ever doubt it, Don Miguel? if so, you insulted me; besides, I shall not be sorry," he added with a smile, "to get out of the sight of the government for a time."

"My friend, I thank you," the hacendero said, as he took his hand. "I have long known that you were entirely devoted to me; I am pleased to receive this new proof of your friendship."

"And you accept it?" the general asked gaily.

"Most heartily; the help of an iron arm like yours must be most useful to me under the painful circumstances in which I am placed."

"That is settled then; we will start together. *Mil rayas*, and I swear we will deliver Dona Clara."

"May Heaven grant it," the hacendero said sadly.

CHAPTER XLI.

DONA CLARA.

VALENTINE had been warned nearly an hour previously, by Unicorn, of the result of the negotiations with the governor of Santa Fé, and the immediate liberation of the prisoners; he was, therefore expecting them. Though they were ignorant where to find him, Valentine presumed that the chief would leave some Indian to direct them, and, therefore, did not feel at all surprised at seeing them. So soon as he noticed their approach he walked to meet them, followed by Don Pablo and the missionary, while the hacendero and his comrade on their side pricked on to join them sooner.

A few hours were spent, after the first greetings were over, in a conference, of which the poor child so audaciously carried off was the sole subject. Valentine drew up with his friends the plan of the campaign against Red Cedar, which was so daring that it would have made the most resolute European nervous; but the free adventurers who were about to carry it out, in no way feared the mysterious dangers of the desert which they were going to confront. We say, free, because Father Seraphin had taken leave of his friends and found Unicorn, with whom he wished to go to the Comanche villages, in the hope of spreading the light of the gospel there. Toward evening Curumilla arrived. The Araucano was covered with dust, and his face damp with perspiration. Not uttering a word, he sat down by the fire, took his calumet from his girdle and began smoking. Valentine let him do so without asking a question, but so soon as he saw him absorbed in his pipe,

"Well?" he said to him.

"Curumilla has seen them."

"Good; are they numerous?"

"Ten times the number of fingers on my two hands, and one more."

"*Caramba!*" Valentine exclaimed.

"They are bold hunters," the chief added.

"Hum! do you know when they will start?"

"This evening, when the new moon rises."

"Ah, ah, I read their plan," the hunter said. "They intend crossing the ford of the Toro before day."

Curumilla bowed his head in affirmation.

"That is true," Valentine remarked; once the ford is passed they will be in the desert, and have comparatively nothing to fear, or at least they suppose so. I must confess," he added, addressing his friends, "that Red Cedar is a remarkably clever scoundrel."

"What shall we do?" Don Miguel asked.

"Sleep," Valentine answered, "we have still several hours before us, so let us profit by them; in the new life we are beginning, we must neglect nothing."

Curumilla had slipped away but now returned, bringing with him two rifles, pistols, and knives.

"My brothers had no weapons," he said, as he laid his load before the Mexicans.

The latter thanked him heartily; for, owing to the foresight of Curumilla, who thought of everything, they could now enter the desert boldly. Two minutes later the five men were fast asleep, and we will take advantage of their slumber to return to Red Cedar, whom we left on the point of climbing through Dona Clara's window.

At one bound the bandit was in the room, after breaking open the window with a blow of his fist. Dona Clara, suddenly aroused, leaped from the bed, uttering fearful cries at the sight of the terrible apparition before her.

"Silence," Red Cedar said to her, "one cry more, and I kill you like a dog."

The maiden, trembling with fright, looked pitifully at the bandit; but Red Cedar's face wore such an expression of cruelty, that she understood how little she had to hope from this man. The bandit gagged the poor child with the rebozo that lay on the bed, threw her over his shoulder, and clambered out of the window again. So soon as he put foot on the ground, he whistled lightly for his comrades to rejoin him.

During the walk, which was not a long one, the bandits did not meet a soul. Andr s opened the door and lit a candle; the ruffians entered, and the door was carefully bolted again. Red Cedar carried Dona Clara, who was in a half-fainting state, to her room, removed the rebozo, and then returned to the bar.

"There," he said, with satisfaction, "that is all right; the sheep has returned to the fold. What do you say, reverend father?"

"We shall do well in not remaining here," he answered, "because this hiding-place is known, and will soon be visited."

The squatter shrugged his shoulders.

"Listen! Fray Ambrosio," he said, with a sinister grimace, which he intended for a smile. "I predict that, rogue as you are, you run a great chance of dying in a fool's skin, if you are not flayed beforehand, which may easily be the case."

The monk shuddered. Red Cedar's gaiety had the peculiarity of being even more fearful than his anger. The squatter sat down on a bench, and turned to the gambusino.

"Drink!" he said roughly.

Garote fetched a jar of mezcal, which he placed before his terrible accomplice. The latter, not taking the trouble to pour the liquor into a glass, raised the jar to his lips, and drank till breath failed him. "Now listen to my orders, my dear children, and try to carry them out to the letter; or, if not, your roguish hides will bear the blame."

The three men bowed silently.

"You, Nathan," he went on, "will come with me, for you are not wanted here, but your presence is necessary at Cierro Prieto."

"I will follow you," the young man replied.

"Good! Now, you others, bear this carefully in mind: our enemies will never suppose that I have made such a mistake as to bring my prisoner back here; for that is so absurd, that the idea will never enter their heads; so you can be at ease, and no one will trouble your peace of mind. To-morrow, so soon as the moon rises, you will make the girl put on an Indian dress, mount her, and come to me at Cierro Prieto. Immediately after your arrival we shall start."

"Good!" said Fray Ambrosio, "we will take care."

"I expect so; for, if you do not, I wouldn't give a *cuartillo* for your accursed hide, my reverend friend."

After uttering these friendly words, the squatter seized the jar of mezcal, emptied it at a draught, and sent it flying across the room, where it broke to pieces.

"Good-bye till to-morrow," he then said, "come on Nathan."

"Till to-morrow," they answered.

The squatter and his son left the rancho, and walked on silently, side by side, plunged in gloomy reflections produced by the events of the night. All at once they

heard the firm footfall of a man coming towards them. They cocked their rifles, ready for any emergency. A voice was then heard, though the person to whom it belonged was invisible.

"My brothers must not fire ; they would kill a friend."

"'Tis an Indian," said Nathan.

"Do you think I did not recognize him?" Red Cedar replied brutally ; then he added, in the same dialect, there are no friends in the shadow of the desert. My brother must get out of my path, or I will kill him like a coyote."

"Is it thus," the Indian continued, "that the 'man-eater' receives the guide whom Stanapat sends him? In that case, good-bye. I will retire."

"One moment," the squatter said, sharply, "I could not guess who you were. Advance without fear, and be welcome."

The Indian stepped forward. He wore the costume and characteristic paint of the Apache warriors ; in a word, he was so well disguised, that Valentine himself could not have recognised in him his friend, Eagle-wing.

Red Cedar, delighted at the arrival of his guide, received him in the most affable manner.

"What is my brother's name?" he asked, in conclusion.

"The Heart of Stone!" Eagle-wing replied.

"Good!" the squatter said, "my brother has a grand name. He must be a renowned warrior in his tribe."

A short time after, the three men reached the camp of the gambusinos, established in a formidable position on the top of a rock called the Cierro Prieto (Black Mountain). The miner's greeted Red Cedar's arrival with the most lively joy.

CHAPTER XLII.

EL VADO DEL TORO.

RED CEDAR reasoned correctly when he told Fray Ambrosio and Garote that Dona Clara was in safety at the rancho, and no one would dream of seeking her there. In truth, Valentine knew the squatter's cunning too well to suppose that he would commit the imprudence of bringing his prisoner back to the very spot where she was discovered.

The squatter's two accomplices passed the day quietly in playing on credit, at montè, each cheating with a dexterity which did honour to their knowledge of that noble game. No one came to disturb them, or cast an indiscreet glance into this infamous den, which, in the bright sunshine, had an air of respectability pleasant to look on, and amply sufficient to dispel all suspicions. About nine in the evening, the moon, though new, rose magnificently on a deep blue sky, studded with brilliant stars.

"I fancy it is time to get ready, gossip," Fray Ambrosio said, "the moon is peering through the trees in your neighbour's garden."

"You are right, senor padre, we will be off; but let me, I implore you first finish this deal ; it is one of the most magnificent I ever witnessed."

"I'll back the two of spades. Something tells me it will turn up first, especially if you pull up the sleeves of your jacket, which must be horribly in the way when dealing."

"On dear, no, I assure you ; but stay ; what did I tell you? There is the seven, of clubs."

"That is really extraordinary," Fray Ambrosio replied with feigned surprise ; "but I fancy we had better make haste."

"Decidedly," said Andrès, as he hid his greasy cards in his boots, and proceeded to the room in which Dona Clara was confined. She followed him out, weeping.

"Come, come," the gambusino said to her, "dry your tears, senorita; we do not mean you any harm; ask that holy monk."

Fray Ambrosio bowed an assent, but the maiden made no response to the gambusino's consolation; she allowed herself to be disguised unresistingly.

"In truth, it is absurd," the worthy Andrès muttered in an aside to himself, while attiring his prisoner, "to waste gold and pearls in this fashion; would it not be much better to use them in buying something serviceable? What she has on her is worth at least three thousand piastres—what a splendid game of *monté* a fellow could have with that sum!"

While making these judicious reflections, the gambusino had completed the maiden's Indian toilet. He perfected the disguise by throwing a zarapé over her shoulders; then giving a parting glance round his domicile, he put in his pocket a pack of cards accidentally left on the table, drank a large glass of spirits, and left the room, followed by Dona Clara and the monk, who, in spite of the varying incidents of the last few days, had regained all his good humour.

Dona Clara was placed on a horse; Andrès and the monk also mounted, and made a wide circuit, to avoid passing through the Presidio, and then started at a gallop in the direction of the Cerro Pietro.

Red Cedar had lost no time, and all was ready for departure. The new-comers did not even dismount, but so soon as they were sighted, the caravan, composed, as we have stated, of some hundred and twenty resolute men, after forming in Indian file, started in the direction of the prairies, having first prudently detached two scouts to watch the neighbourhood.

They marched for upwards of three hours, and nothing appeared to justify their fears; a solemn calmness continued to prevail around them. Gradually these apprehensions were dissipated; they began talking in a suppressed voice, and laughing at their past terrors, when they reached, on the banks of the Del Norte, the *vado*, or Ford del Toro.

There are only two methods of crossing even the widest rivers—looking for a ford, or, if you are in a great hurry, forcing your horse into the oft-times rapid current, and trying to reach the other bank by swimming.

The squatter had selected the first method, and in a few minutes the whole party was in the water. Although the ground of the ford was uneven, and at times the horses were up to their chests, and compelled to swim, the gambusinos managed to get across safely. The only persons left on the bank were Red Cedar, Eagle-wing, the guide, Dona Clara, and Andrès Garote.

"It is our turn now, Heart of Stone," the squatter said, addressing Eagle-wing; "you see that our men are in safety, and only await us to set out again."

"The squaw first," the Indian replied, laconically.

"That is true, chief," the squatter said, and, turning to the prisoner, "Go across," he said to her, coarsely.

The maiden, not deigning to answer, boldly made her horse enter the river, and the three men followed. The night was dark, the sky covered with clouds, and the moon, constantly veiled, only shone forth at lengthened intervals, which rendered the passage difficult and even dangerous, as it did not allow objects to be distinguished, even at a short distance. Still, after a few seconds, Red Cedar fancied he saw that Dona Clara's horse was not following the line traced by the ford, but was turning to the left, as if carried away by the current. He pushed his horse forward, to assure himself of the reality of the fact; but suddenly a vigorous hand seized his right leg, and before he could even think of resisting, he was hurled back into the water, and his throat seized by an Indian.

During this time, Dona Clara's horse, probably obeying a hidden impulse, was proceeding still further from the spot where the gambusinos had landed. Some of them, at the head of whom were Dick, Harry, and the squatter's three sons, perceiving what was going on, returned to the water, to proceed to their chief's help, while the others, guided by Fray Ambrosio, galloped down the river-bank, in order to cut off retreat, when Dona Clara's horse landed.

Andrès Garote, after several fruitless efforts, succeeded in catching Red Cedar's horse, which he brought to him at the moment when the latter had scalped his enemy and raised his scalp.

The Coras sachem had urged his steed in pursuit of Dona Clara's, and both were following almost the same line down the stream, the former striving to catch up to the latter, who, for her part, was doing her utmost to widen the distance between them. Suddenly the Coras' horse gave a leap, while uttering a snort of pain, and began madly beating the water with its forelegs, while the river was tinged with blood around it. The chief, perceiving that his horse was mortally wounded, leaped from his saddle, and leant over the side, ready to leap off. At this moment a hideous face appeared flush with the water, and a hand was stretched out to grasp him. With that imperturbable coolness that never deserts the Indians, even under the most critical circumstances, the Coras seized his tomahawk, split his enemy's skull open, and glided into the river.

A formidable war-yell was, at this moment, heard from the forest, and some fifty shots were fired from both banks at once, illumining the scene with their fugitive flashes. A multitude of red-skins rushed on the gambusinos, and a terrible fight commenced. The Mexicans, taken unawares, defended themselves at first poorly, giving ground and seeking shelter behind trees; but obeying the thundering voice of the squatter, who performed prodigies of valour while exciting his comrades to sell their lives dearly, they regained courage, formed in close column, and charged the Indians furiously, beating them down with the butts of their muskets, or slashing them with their machetes.

The combat was short; the red-skins, who were only a party of maulauding Pawnees, seeing the ill-result of their surprise, grew discouraged, and disappeared as rapidly as they had come. Two minutes later calmness and silence were so perfectly re-established, that had it not been for a few wounded gambusinos, and several Indians stretched dead on the battlefield, the strange scene would have appeared as a dream.

So soon as the Indians were routed, Red Cedar bent an eager glance up the river; on that side the struggle was also over, and Eagle-wing, mounted behind the young lady, was guiding her horse to the bank, which it soon reached.

"Well?" the squatter asked.

"The Pawnees are cowardly coyotes," the Coras answered. "They fly like old women, so soon as they see the war plume of a warrior of my nation."

"Good!" the squatter said, gleefully, "my brother is a great warrior; he has a friend."

The Coras bowed with a smile of indescribable meaning. His object was gained; he had acquired the confidence of the man he meant to destroy. Dona Clara, Ellen, and the squatter's wife were placed in the centre of the caravan, and the band started again.

An hour later, a second party of horsemen also crossed the Vado del Toro. It was much less numerous than the first, as it consisted of only five men, but they were Valentine, Curumilla, Don Miguel, his son, and General Ibanez.

[Those of our readers who take an interest in the Trail-Hunter, we must ask to follow his adventures through another volume, called—THE PIRATES OF THE PRAIRIES.]

OUT OF THE MIRE

many a family has been raised by the genuine philanthropy of modern progress and of modern opportunities. But many people do not avail of them. They jog along in their old ways until they are stuck fast in a mire of hopeless dirt. Friends desert them, for they have already deserted themselves by neglecting their own best interests. Out of the dirt of kitchen, or hall or parlor, any house can be quickly brought by the use of Sapolio which is sold by all grocers at 10c. a cake.

SOCIAL SOLUTIONS

(*Solutions Sociales*).

By M. GODIN,

Founder of the Familistère at Guise; Prominent Leader of Industries in France and Belgium; Member of the National Assembly.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
MARIE HOWLAND.

1 vol., 12mo, illustrated, cloth gilt, \$1.50.

An admirable English translation of M. Godin's statement of the course of study which led him to conceive the Social Palace at Guise, France. There is no question that this publication will mark an era in the growth of the labor question. It should serve as the manual for organized labor in its present contest, since its teachings will as surely lead to the destruction of the wages system as the abolition movement lead to that of chattel slavery.

JOHN W. LOVELL CO., Publishers,
14 and 16 Vesey Street, NEW YORK.

JAMES PYLE'S



PEARLINE

THE BEST
WASHING COMPOUND
EVER INVENTED.

No Lady. Married or Single, Rich or Poor, Housekeeping or Boarding, will be without it after testing its utility.

Sold by all first-class Grocers, but beware of worthless imitations

LOVELL'S LIBRARY.

COMPLETE CATALOGUE BY AUTHORS.

LOVELL'S LIBRARY now contains the complete writings of most of the best standard authors, such as Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot, Carlyle, Ruskin, Scott, Lytton, Black, etc., etc.

Each number is issued in neat 12mo form, and the type will be found larger, and the paper better, than in any other cheap series published.

JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY,

P. O. Box 1992.

14 and 16 Vesey St., New York.

BY MAX ADELER

295	Random Shots.....	20
325	Elbow Room.....	20

BY GUSTAVE AIMARD

560	The Adventurers.....	10
567	The Trail-Hunter.....	10
573	Pearl of the Andes.....	10

BY MRS. ALDERDICE

846	An Interesting Case	20
-----	---------------------------	----

BY MRS. ALEXANDER

62	The Wooing O't, 2 Parts, each.....	15
99	The Admiral's Ward.....	20
209	The Executor	20
349	Valerie's Fate.....	10
864	At Bay.....	10
746	Beaton's Bargain.....	20

BY HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

419	Fairy Tales.....	20
-----	------------------	----

BY F. ANSTEY

30	Vice Versâ; or, A Lesson to Fathers.....	20
394	The Giant's Robe.....	20
453	Black Poodle, and Other Tales.....	20
616	The Tinted Venus.....	15
755	A Fallen Idol.....	20

BY EDWIN ARNOLD

436	The Light of Asia.....	20
455	Pearls of the Faith.....	15
472	Indian Song of Songs.....	10

BY T. S. ARTHUR

496	Woman's Trials.....	20
507	The Two Wives.....	15
518	Married Life.....	15
538	The Ways of Providence.....	15
545	Home Scenes.....	15
554	Stories for Parents.....	15
563	Seed-Time and Harvest.....	15
568	Words for the Wise.....	15
574	Stories for Young Housekeepers.....	15
579	Lessons in Life.....	15
582	Off-Hand Sketches.....	15
585	Tried and Tempted.....	15

BY W. E. AYTOUN

551	Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers.....	20
-----	-------------------------------------	----

BY ADAM BADEAU

756	Conspiracy.....	25
-----	-----------------	----

BY SIR SAMUEL BAKER

206	Cast up by the Sea.....	20
227	Rifle and Hound in Ceylon.....	20
233	Eight Years' Wandering in Ceylon.....	20

BY C. W. BALESTIER

381	A Fair Device.....	20
405	Life of J. G. Blaine.....	20

BY R. M. BALLANTYNE

215	The Red Eric.....	20
226	The Fire Brigade.....	20
239	Erling the Bold.....	20
241	Deep Down.....	20

BY GEORGE MIDDLETON BAYNE

460	Galaski.....	20
-----	--------------	----

BY AUGUST BEBEL

712	Woman.....	30
-----	------------	----

BY MRS. E. BEDELL BENJAMIN

748	Our Roman Palace.....	20
-----	-----------------------	----

BY A. BENRIMO

470	Vic.....	15
-----	----------	----

BY W. BERGSOE

77	Pillone.....	15
----	--------------	----

BY E. BERTHET

366	The Sergeant's Legacy.....	20
-----	----------------------------	----

BY BESANT AND RICE

103	Let Nothing You Dismay.....	10
118	They Were Married.....	10
257	All in a Garden Fair.....	20
268	When the Ship Comes Home.....	10
384	Dorothy Forster.....	20
699	Self or Bearer.....	10

BY BJORNSTJERNE BJÖRNSON

3	The Happy Boy.....	10
4	Arne.....	10

BY WILLIAM BLACK

40	An Adventure in Thule, etc.....	10
48	A Princess of Thule.....	20

82	A Daughter of Heth.....	20
35	Shandon Bells.....	20
93	Macleod of Dare.....	20
136	Yolande.....	20
142	Strange Adventures of a Phaeton.....	20
146	White Wings.....	20
153	Sunrise, 2 Parts, each.....	15
178	Madcap Violet.....	20
180	Kilmeny.....	20
182	That Beautiful Wretch.....	20
184	Green Pastures, etc.....	20
188	In Silk Attire.....	20
213	The Three Feathers.....	20
216	Lady Silverdale's Sweetheart.....	10
217	The Four MacNicol's.....	10
218	Mr. Pisistratus Brown, M.P.....	10
225	Oliver Goldsmith.....	10
282	Monarch of Mincing Lane.....	20
456	Judith Shakespeare.....	20
584	Wise Women of Inverness.....	10
678	White Heather.....	20

BY LILLIE D. BLAKE

103	Woman's Place To-day.....	20
597	Fettered for Life.....	25

BY MISS M. E. BRADDON

88	The Golden Calf.....	20
104	Lady Audley's Secret.....	20
214	Phantom Fortune.....	20
266	Under the Red Flag.....	10
444	An Ishmaelite.....	20
555	Aurora Floyd.....	20
588	To the Bitter End.....	20
698	The Mistletoe Bough.....	20
766	Vixen.....	20

BY ANNIE BRADSHAW

716	A Crimson Stain.....	20
-----	----------------------	----

BY CHARLOTTE BREMER

448	Life of Fredrika Bremer.....	20
-----	------------------------------	----

BY CHARLOTTE BRONTË

74	Jane Eyre.....	20
----	----------------	----

BY RHODA BROUGHTON

23	Second Thoughts.....	20
230	Belinda.....	20

BY ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

421	Aurora Leigh ..	20
479	Poems.....	35

BY ROBERT BROWNING

552	Selections from Poetical Works.....	20
-----	-------------------------------------	----

BY WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

443	Poems.....	20
-----	------------	----

BY ROBERT BUCHANAN

318	The New Abelard.....	20
696	The Master of the Mine.....	10

BY JOHN BUNYAN

200	The Pilgrim's Progress.....	20
-----	-----------------------------	----

BY ROBERT BURNS

430	Poems.....	20
-----	------------	----

BY REV. JAS. S. BUSH

113	More Words about the Bible.....	20
-----	---------------------------------	----

BY E. LASSETER BYNNER

100	Nimport, 2 Parts, each.....	15
102	Tritons, 2 Parts, each.....	15

BY THOMAS CAMPBELL

526	Poems.....	20
596	Dead Sea Fruit.....	20

BY ROSA NOUCHETE CAREY

660	For Lilies.....	20
-----	-----------------	----

BY WM. CARLETON

190	Willy Reilly.....	20
-----	-------------------	----

BY THOMAS CARLYLE

486	History of French Revolution, 2 Parts, each.....	25
494	Past and Present.....	20
500	The Diamond Necklace; and Mirabeau.....	20
503	Chartism.....	20
508	Sartor Resartus.....	20
514	Early Kings of Norway.....	20
520	Jean Paul Friedrich Richter.....	10
522	Goethe, and Miscellaneous Essays.....	10
525	Life of Heyne.....	15
528	Voltaire and Novalis.....	15
541	Heroes, and Hero-Worship.....	20
546	Signs of the Times.....	15
550	German Literature.....	15
561	Portraits of John Knox.....	15
571	Count Cagliostro, etc.....	15
578	Frederick the Great, Vol. I.....	20
580	" " " Vol. II.....	20
591	" " " Vol. III.....	20
610	" " " Vol. IV.....	20
619	" " " Vol. V.....	20
622	" " " Vol. VI.....	20
626	" " " Vol. VII.....	20
628	" " " Vol. VIII.....	20
630	Life of John Sterling.....	20
633	Latter-Day Pamphlets.....	20
636	Life of Schiller.....	20
643	Oliver Cromwell, Vol. I.....	25
646	" " Vol. II.....	25
649	" " Vol. III.....	25
652	Characteristics and other Essays... ..	15
656	Corn Law Rhymes and other Essays.....	15
658	Baillie the Covenanter and other Essays.....	15
661	Dr. Francia and other Essays.....	15

BY LEWIS CARROLL

480	Alice's Adventures.....	20
481	Through the Looking-Glass.....	20

BY "CAVENDISH"

422	Cavendish Card Essays.....	15
-----	----------------------------	----

BY CERVANTES

417	Don Quixote.....	30
-----	------------------	----

BY L. W. CHAMPNEY

119	Bourbon Lilies.....	20
-----	---------------------	----

BY VICTOR CHERBULIEZ

242	Samuel Brohl & Co.....	20
-----	------------------------	----

LOVELL'S LIBRARY.

LATEST ISSUES.

746 Beaton's Bargain, Mrs. Alexander..20	798 The Prince of the Hundred Soups, by Vernon Lee10
747 Social Solutions, No. 2, by Howland.10	799 Maid, Wife, or Widow? by Mrs. Alexander.....10
748 Our Roman Palace, by Benjamin...20	800 Thorns and Orange Blossoms, by B. M. Clay.....10
749 Mayor of Casterbridge, by Hardy..20	801 Romance of a Black Veil, by Clay.10
750 Somebody's Story, by Hugh Conway.10	802 Lady Valworth's Diamonds.....10
751 King Arthur, by Miss Mulock...20	803 Love's Warfare, by B. M. Clay...10
752 Set in Diamonds, by B. M. Clay...20	804 Madolin's Lover, by B. M. Clay...20
753 Social Solutions, No. 3, by Howland.10	805 A House Party, by Ouida.....10
754 A Modern Midas, by Maurice Jokai.20	806 From Out the Gloom, by Clay.....20
755 A Fallen Idol, by F. Anstey.....20	807 Which Loved Him Best? by Clay..10
756 Conspiracy, by Adam Badeau...25	808 A True Magdalen, by B. M. Clay..20
757 Doris' Fortune, by F. Warden...10	809 The Sin of a Lifetime, by Clay....20
758 Cynic Fortune, by D. C. Murray...10	810 Prince Charlie's Daughter, by Clay.10
759 Foul Play, by Chas. Reade.....20	811 A Golden Heart, by B. M. Clay....10
760 Fair Women, by Mrs. Forrester....20	812 Wife in Name Only, by B. M. Clay.20
761 Count of Monte Cristo, Part I., by Alexandre Dumas.....20	813 King Solomon's Mines.....20
761 Count of Monte Cristo, Part II., by Alexandre Dumas.....20	814 Mohawks, by Miss M. E. Braddon.20
762 Social Solutions, No. 4, by Howland.10	815 A Woman's Error, by B. M. Clay..20
763 Moths, by Ouida.....20	816 The Broken Seal, by Dora Russell.20
764 A Fair Mystery, by Bertha M. Clay.20	817 The Cruise of the Black Prince, by Commander Lovett-Cameron....20
765 Social Solutions, No. 5, by Howland.10	818 Once Again, by Mrs. Forrester...20
766 Vixen, by Miss Braddon20	819 Treasure Island, by Stevenson....20
767 Kidnapped, by R. L. Stevenson...20	820 Shane Fadh's Wedding, by Carleton.10
768 The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, by R. L. Stevenson..10	821 Larry McFarland's Wake, by Wil- liam Carleton.....10
769 Prince Otto, by R. L. Stevenson...10	822 The Party Fight and Funeral, by William Carleton.....10
770 The Dynamiter, by R. L. Stevenson.20	823 The Midnight Mass, by Carleton...10
771 The Old Mam'selle's Secret, by E. Marlitt20	824 Phil Purcel, by William Carleton.10
772 Mysteries of Paris, Part I., by Sue.20	825 An Irish Oath, by Carleton.....10
772 Mysteries of Paris, Part II., by Sue.20	826 Going to Maynooth, by Carleton...10
773 Put Yourself in His Place, by Reade.20	827 Phelim O'Toole's Courtship, by William Carleton...10
774 Social Solutions, No. 6, by Howland.10	828 Dominick the Poor Scholar, by William Carleton.....10
775 The Three Guardsmen, by Dumas.20	829 Neal Malone, by William Carleton..10
776 The Wandering Jew, Part I., by Sue.20	830 Twilight Club Tracts, by Wingate.20
776 The Wandering Jew, Part II., by Sue.20	831 The Son of His Father, by Oliphant.20
777 A Second Life, by Mrs. Alexander.20	832 Sir Percival, by J. H. Shorthouse.10
778 Social Solutions, No. 7, by Howland.10	833 A Voyage to the Cape, by Russell..20
779 My Friend Jim, by W. E. Norris..10	834 Jack's Courtship, by Russell.....20
780 Bad to Beat, by Hawley Smart....10	835 A Sailor's Sweetheart, by Russell..20
781 Betty's Visions, by Broughton....15	836 On the Fo'k'sle Head, by Russell..20
782 Social Solutions, No. 8, by Howland.10	837 Marked "In Haste," by Roosevelt.20
783 The Octoroon, by Miss Braddon...20	838 The George-Hewitt Campaign....20
784 Les Miserables, Part I., by Hugo..20	839 The Guilty River, by Collins.....10
784 Les Miserables, Part II., by Hugo.20	840 By Woman's Wit, by Alexander....20
784 Les Miserables, Part III., by Hugo.20	841 Dr. Cupid, by Rhoda Broughton..20
785 Social Solutions, No. 9, by Howland.10	842 The World Went Very Well Then, by Walter Besant.....20
786 Twenty Years After, by Dumas....20	843 My Lord and My Lady, by Mrs. Forrester.....20
787 A Wicked Girl, by Mary Cecil Hay.10	844 Dolores, by Mrs. Forrester.....20
788 Social Solutions, No. 10, by Howland.10	845 I Have Lived and Loved, by Mrs. Forrester.....20
789 Charles O'Malley, P't I., by Lever.20	846 An Algonquin Maiden, by Adams..20
789 Charles O'Malley, P't II., by Lever.20	847 The Ho'y Rose, by Walter Besant.10
790 Othmar, by Ouida.....20	848 She, by H. Rider Haggard....20
791 Social Solutions, No. 11, by Howland.10	849 Handy Andy, by Samuel Lover...20
792 Her Week's Amusement, by "The Duchess".....10	850 My Hero, by Mrs. Forrester.....20
793 New Arabian Nights, by Stevenson.20	
794 Tom Burke of Ours, P't I., by Lever.20	
794 Tom Burke of Ours, P't II., by Lever.20	
795 Social Solutions, No. 12, by Howland.10	
796 Property in Land, by Henry George.15	
797 A Phantom Lover, by Vernon Lee.10	

Any of the above can be obtained from all booksellers and newsdealers, or will be sent free by mail, on receipt of price, by the publishers,

JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY,
Nos. 14 AND 16 VESEY STREET, NEW YORK.

*Tid-Bits or bonnebouches chosen from the wisest and wit-
tiest words that find their way into print about all
the topics that make the world interesting.*

THE CHEAPEST WEEKLY PUBLISHED.

TID-BITS

ILLUSTRATED.

Offering, at the extremely low price of

===== **FIVE CENTS** =====

SIXTEEN PAGES filled with the sifted goodness and richness of the current periodicals and newspapers.

It Never Prints a Dull Line!

SIXTEEN PAGES filled with original matter written for TID-BITS by the best writers. TID-BITS touches the life of our times on every side, and is an "abstract and brief chronicle" of current thought—grave and gay.

HUMOROUS ILLUSTRATIONS.—TID-BITS' cartoons are the work of the cleverest caricaturists. They are graphic and pointed.

PRIZES.—A prize of \$10 is offered weekly for the best short story—not necessarily original—submitted to the editor, and prizes for answers to questions of various sorts are also offered from time to time.

If there is anything new worth knowing you will find it in TID-BITS.

If there is anything new worth laughing at you will find it in TID-BITS.

So much intelligence, liveliness, and humor cannot be had for 5 cents in any other form.

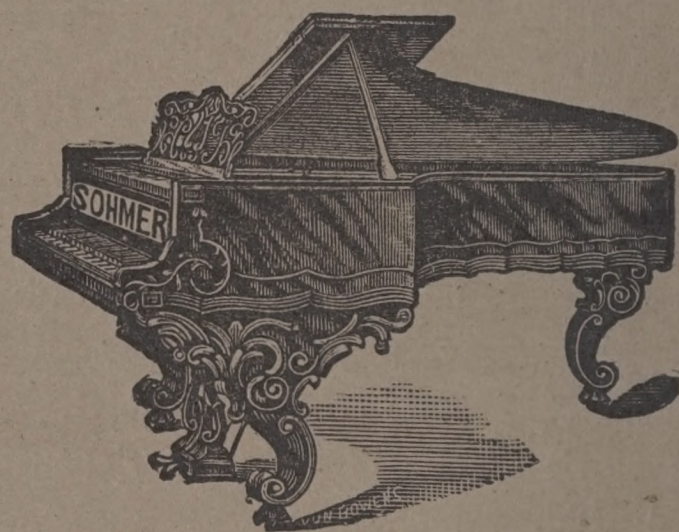
A sample copy will be sent free of postage to anyone addressing the publishers. Subscription, \$2.50 a year.

JOHN W. LOVELL CO., 14 Vesey Street, New York.

THE CELEBRATED

SOHMER

Grand, Square and Upright



PIANOFORTES

ARE PREFERRED BY THE LEADING ARTISTS.

The demands now made by an educated musical public are so exacting that very few Pianoforte Manufacturers can produce Instruments that will stand the test which merit requires. SOHMER & CO., as Manufacturers, rank amongst these chosen few, who are acknowledged to be makers of standard instruments. In these days, when Manufacturers urge the low price of their wares rather than their superior quality as an inducement to purchase, it may not be amiss to suggest that, in a Piano, quality and price are too inseparably joined to expect the one without the other.

Every Piano ought to be judged as to the quality of its tone, its touch, and its workmanship; if any one of these is wanting in excellence, however good the others may be, the instrument will be imperfect. It is the combination of these qualities in the highest degree that constitutes the perfect Piano, and it is this combination that has given the "SOHMER" its honorable position with the trade and the public.

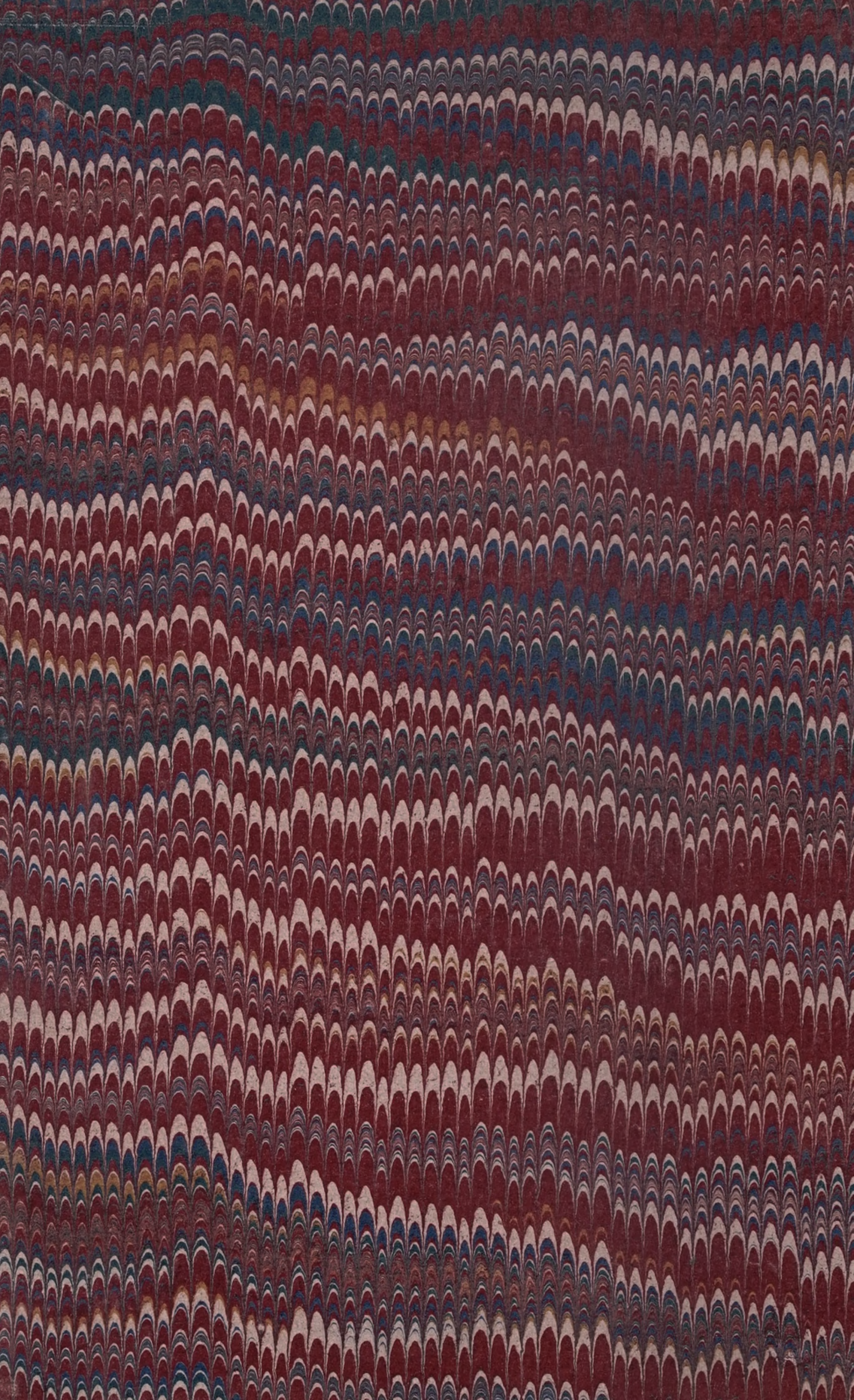
Received First Prize Centennial Exhibition, Philadelphia, 1876.

Received First Prize at Exhibition, Montreal, Canada, 1881 and 1882.

SOHMER & CO., Manufacturers,

149-155 East 14th St., New York.







LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00014665584